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OLD MYDDELTON'S MONEY.

VOL. III.

OLD MYDDELTON'S MONEY.

BY

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"VICTOR AND VANQUISHED,"

&c. &c.



IN THREE VOLUMES.

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OLD MYDDELTON'S MONEY.

CHAPTER I.

Over all things brooding slept
The quiet sense of something lost.

TENNYSON.

THAT London season was a perfect dream of delight to Phoebe Owen. She had never been accustomed to indulge in fancies of any kind, but if she had, the wildest flight of her fancy could not have soared to such splendour, and ease, and variety as that in which she revelled now in Honor's shadow. But not until months afterwards did she understand how much more of this happiness and unmixed pleasure had been owing to Honor herself than to

the constant round of gaiety and brilliancy to which she gave the credit.

Never had Honor's nature held a grain of selfishness, but in this wealthy, courted life of hers the fact was more apparent to Phoebe than it had been in those old days at The Larches. Perhaps this was because Phoebe's perceptions were widening a little, now that the one idol on which for years they had been centred was—unwillingly, forsooth, but not the less ruthlessly—being withdrawn; but perhaps it was because the power which now lay in Honor's hands was broad and great. In any case, the Kensington house was a home of almost unreal happiness and splendour to Phoebe, and the example of her cousin's life was of untold benefit to her.

Nor was she the only one to whom Honor made the grand old mansion into a beautiful and tempting home. From what, by her bright unvarying kindness and gentle steadfast help, she had rescued Hervey, he could only fully recognise a year afterwards, when he declared,

with a humiliation which was new to him, yet of which he felt no shame—

“I can often see the pitiful sight of idle men lounging about town, who are only just what I myself should have been if Honor had not saved me; and, if I could do for them what she has done for me, I would; but then it is only the few who *can* do it.”

Thus, for Hervey and for Phoebe, Honor made a home to which they were brightly welcomed, and in its happy light, and under her loving influence, the old idle and selfish habits fell from them, too sickly to bear this pure, bright atmosphere.

But this was not all the good that Honor did, even in the very heart of that world of gaiety and unrest, while she reigned a queen triumphant, wielding her three-fold sceptre of beauty, youth and wealth. Few who met her in the brilliant saloons where she was ever the prominent figure—worshipped openly as one whom it was natural to worship—could have guessed where

many hours of the day had been spent, or how those hours had been used. Few could have guessed what generous gifts had been distributed quietly by the small white hands which it was a privilege to touch. Few could have guessed what comforting and strengthening words had been uttered by the lips whose smile was reward for hours of indefatigable attendance, and few could have guessed how anxious to do good was the girlish heart whose zest in all amusements was as fresh as if that heart were *not* strong and steadfast for its work in the solemn battle of life.

No; few could have guessed, although there were times when the girl drooped wearily under the burden of her great responsibility, and could almost longingly recall that old life, whose only gleams of brilliance had been day-dreams of wild and sweet impossibilities. Her dreams were of future still—poor Honor!—when she allowed them to come at all; but her own was not the central figure now, as it had been in

those old times; indeed, her own was rarely there at all; and *these* dreams were all grey, and chill, and lonely. Now and then, but rarely, came back to her that autumn day when she had walked beside Royden while he told her how he loved her; or that evening, when, in his own home, she had turned with negligence from the same story. But when such memories did come she stifled them as if they hurt her, and then returned those haunting dreams of the future, in which she saw him always alone, solitary, and unhappy; watched and suspected; always alone in the crowds which clustered about him, and even in whose merriment he joined—a man standing apart. So she saw him, chastened in heart and intellect; and it was this constant haunting thought of his grave and solitary life which brought that dreamy sadness to her eyes so often, and kept at bay all thought of love and close companionship.

They met often. In the whirl of life into which both were so eagerly tempted, it was im-

possible it should be otherwise; but there was always now a barrier between them which, though invisible, was inexorably impassable; and which it must be impossible ever to pass again, because neither could speak of it unless in that horrible alternative of Lawrence Haughton's carrying his threat into execution, and making his suspicion public. As yet Mr. Haughton had taken no step towards this result, beyond one more threatening interview with Honor, in which he had shown her the burnt scrap of paper which he had so long guarded under lock and key, and of which he had before only told her. Honor, standing opposite him, while he insisted on showing it to her, bent and examined it, though apparently the scarred fragment possessed little interest for her. Lawrence could not see her eyes, and waited so long in vain for any remark which might betray her conviction or fear, that at last, in despair, he reminded her harshly of this incontrovertible evidence. She raised her face

slowly, and answered in her usual tones.

"*Dear Gabriel*, those are the words you bid me read; but I see no interest in them, Lawrence. I might easily write such words of my own cousin Gabriel, if I chose—to any one," she added, with peculiar emphasis.

And then she turned away; muttering that the room was so warm it made her feel faint; and putting her hand to her head, she closed her eyes one moment, turning white as death.

"The letter," observed Mr. Haughton, while he watched her narrowly, "was written to the man who calls himself Royden Keith, and it is so commenced—*dear Gabriel*—in a lady's hand."

"I do not think so," replied Honor, in that quiet tone of dissent to which her old guardian should have been accustomed now. "We women, as a rule, use capitals in such a case. I think these words came in the middle of the letter."

"Absurd," interposed the lawyer, with impatience. "Yet even if it were so, what differ-

ence would that make? If she must call him 'dear Gabriel' in the middle of the letter as well as at the beginning, like a love-sick——"

"I do not understand the necessity of discussing this, Lawrence."

"Yes, you do—you must," he retorted; "and you would be mad to pretend that there is any loophole for escape from my conviction. To address the one to whom you write as 'dear Gabriel' is a pretty incontrovertible proof that Gabriel is the name of the person to whom the letter is sent. You see it so yourself, as plainly as I see it."

"Gabriel is not a—a very uncommon name," said Honor, and Mr. Haughton's hopes rose a little, for he read the anguish of suspicion which she tried in vain to hide.

The interview had not ended there, for the old suit had been again desperately urged, and the old promise repeated, in vain; but after this he had taken no further step forward in his threatened bringing to justice of old

Myddelton's murderer; and Honor rightly surmised that her old guardian was too astute a lawyer to make his accusation public until he held an unbroken thread of evidence.

Sometimes Honor and Theodora Trent met in society, but not very often, as there were limits to the circle in which Mrs. and Miss Trent displayed their graces, and even within these limits Honor Craven's presence was eagerly sought. Except for a passing regret that old ties and memories could be so ruthlessly snapped by jealousy, it made no difference to Honor when Theodora happened to be in the same assembly. She invariably spoke to her, though no longer like an old friend, as she used to do, for Miss Trent's marked glances and innuendoes could not be misunderstood. If it had been possible, Theodora would have robbed Honor of the admiration and the love she gained so easily; but being utterly impossible, Miss Trent was fain to content herself with dropping casual and infectious hints, or express-

ing all that looks and gestures could express. And it could hardly be that these poisonous words and glances could fall as harmlessly on every one as they had fallen on Royden Keith.

In those meetings, which were so brief, between himself and Honor, she was ever very quiet, just as she might have been if she had feared to trust herself. And he, noticing that always at his coming there would fall over her face a stillness which looked like weariness, made those meetings fewer and more brief, as the London season neared its zenith. Even Phoebe noticed that this silence fell upon her cousin even when she only mentioned Royden's name, and it taught the girl a new experience, and even a new wisdom. Her cousin, whose love and brightness had made the only sunshine her life had ever held, who was so much better and wiser and brighter than herself, though five years younger, had some soreness at heart in spite of all the splendour and the luxury about her, in spite of her beautiful houses and her host of

lovers, in spite of her talents and her great beauty.

The only relief for sorrow of any kind, which had come within the radius of Miss Owen's imagination, was reciprocity; yet Honor did not avail herself of this. Whatever this soreness at heart might be, Honor bore it silently and alone, letting no shadow of her grief fall upon the path she made so bright for others. It taught the elder girl a lesson, too, of patience and unselfishness; not unneeded, though Honor's daily example had made her now a pleasant companion, sympathetic, if still excitable, and kind in her harmless pursuit of pleasure. She was, as Hervey told her one day, in a tone of approval which was equally new and pleasant to Phoebe, "losing her gushing proclivities, and was wonderfully the gainer by the loss."

And Hervey meant what he said. He had forgiven her intrusion into the Kensington mansion, because, under Honor's skilful manage-

ment, he was made to feel only the pleasant effect of her society; and it was impossible, seeing Honor's treatment of them both, for him to dream of Phoebe as an interloper. So, gradually he grew to believe what Honor had meant him to believe that it was altogether a pleasant arrangement. True, there were still times when he wished for nothing on earth so strongly as Phoebe's absence; but then the feeling wore itself out as Honor's conduct to himself still continued to keep all lover-like ambition at bay, and still more rapidly wore itself out as Phoebe's silly moods grew rarer; as common sense leavened her ecstasies, and the desire to please, rather than charm, lightened her somewhat heavy and disjointed converse.

So life went on in London, and Honor, ever working ceaselessly and patiently to probe that secret of old Myddelton's murder, was still gay, and sweet, and piquante in the society in which she was courted, walking as it seemed ever brightly in her path of roses, though the burden

of a pain, unshared and unspoken of, pressed upon her.

She had arranged to go to Abbotsmoor early in July, and though Phoebe could not look forward with unmixed pleasure to leaving the London world, which was so full of delight for her, she could still find solace in the prospect of reigning with Honor in the now beautiful mansion which, in their childhood, had seemed to them an Aladdin's palace in its shroud, behind whose rust and cobwebs slept a wonderful grandeur. In this grandeur she was to be almost equal to Honor, and there would always be guests and gaiety, although Honor would be sure to work there in carrying out those curious projects of hers for the good of the poor, who had been so long neglected by the possessors of old Myddelton's money and estate, and even for the good of many who, in this great city, struggled upon the hard highway of life, or fell and fainted on the battleplain.


"And in all these things I shall be useless," mused Phoebe, not—to her credit—in her unwillingness to help, but in the consciousness of her own incapacity. "But," and this was her consolatory conclusion, "June is not gone yet."

The certainty of this fact was especially refreshing to her on the morning before the ball which Honor was to give in her mansion at Kensington, on one of the last days of that hot summer month.

"It will be such a superb party," Phoebe exclaimed in rapture; "won't it, Honor?"

Honor, smiling, said she hoped so; and then dreamed over it quietly, seeing most clearly among the crowd that one figure which, in those dreams of hers, always seemed to stand apart. Surely for this night he would come, she thought. "We are going away so soon, and he has accepted my invitation. Oh! he is sure to come."

Merrily all that day, the girls ran about the great house, taking such a fresh and childish



pleasure in the preparations, that great was the astonishment of the solemn servants, as well as of the workmen and women, who found it hard to ply their hammers and their needles with a beseeching gravity.

"What are you thinking of, Honor?" inquired Phoebe, when they sat resting over their afternoon tea.

"I was recalling," said Honor, sitting lazily opposite her cousin, who, in a state of pride and suppressed excitement, presided over the exquisite little tea equipage, "I was recalling the parties—rare as old china—which we used to have at The Larches. Weren't we always in a state of ferment, little Frau? and wasn't our anxiety intense over our dresses?"

"Mine was," modified Phoebe, with honesty. "And do you remember how angry Jane used to be when you produced some unexpected game or luxury, on which you had surreptitiously spent all your pocket-money, hoping to glean a little fun from it?"

"Such humble purchases, too," mused Honor, smiling.

"They seem so now," returned Phoebe, looking round the beautiful rooms, and thinking of the gorgeous and lavish preparations for Honor's ball; "but we thought them tremendous then, and Jane always pronounced them absurd and ruinous extravagance."

"I remember once, before a dinner-party," said Honor, laughing, "I went into Kinbury and speculated in a box of crackers. It was Christmas time, and they looked pretty and might provoke a laugh, I thought. I hid them away when I got home, only intending to bring them out at the last moment, for fear of not being allowed to exhibit them; but of course Jane found them, and forbid me to put them on the table. Picture woe like mine!"

"I remember," said Phoebe, growing dismal over even the recollection; "and I cried, and told Lawrence, and he scolded Jane, and ordered them to be put just where you chose, and

you were vexed with me, and hid the crackers. And don't you remember, Honor, that we found them the autumn after, and took them with us to the Statton Woods when we went to sketch; and Hervey joined us. Oh, you remember!" cried Phoebe, springing up to look if Honor's cup was empty, "and he wanted to crack them all with you, and pretended the mottoes were true. Such a contrast to Mr. Keith, who came with him that day, and never offered to crack one with you, but all the while turned to me. It was a novelty for me," concluded the elder cousin, smiling, "because Hervey was always eager to join with you in everything; and as for Lawrence——"

But Phoebe paused there. Not even yet could she finish calmly any allusion to her guardian's indifference to herself, and undisguised love for Honor, though each day—as she herself was now aware—it was growing easier for her.

"How many dances have you promised

Hervey for to-night ?" inquired Honor, simply for the purpose of turning the conversation. And from that point the girls' talk hovered merrily about the coming ball, until their sociable afternoon rest was over, and they ran off again to inspect the hanging of the silver lamps which gleamed in purity among the flowers.

"All finished now," said Honor, smiling at Phoebe's ecstatic gestures when they paid their last visit to the reception-rooms, which from end to end were like a fairy palace of brilliancy and beauty, with softly-treading servants moving here and there like phantom forms which should vanish when the dazzling figures of the guests should take their place. "All finished, little Fran, and this *may* be a very happy night."

"Why only *may* be?" asked Phoebe. "Of course it will be ; every single person you care for has accepted your invitation, Honor. Why are you doubtful?"

"Because," said the girl, bringing her lustrous gaze from the vista of drapery and ex-



otics, "because I feel that this night must be *very* happy, or very——Come, though, let us decorate ourselves, little Frau, now that the rooms are decorated," and she turned and raced away from Phoebe, just as she used to do when they were children, and the sturdy limbs of the little Frau had no chance against the speed of her willowy little cousin.

'Though Honor's rooms seemed filled with guests that night, for her there was one great vacancy. The girlish hostess, in her bright loveliness and thoughtful cordiality, seemed happy and content amid her guests, yet her heart beat painfully as every name was announced, and her eyes saddened for a moment in the silence which followed.

Eleven — twelve — one — two — three. The dawning of the June morning, and Honor's guests folding their cloaks about them—or allowing their partners to do so—and telling each other that they never *had* enjoyed themselves so much before, or that they were tired to

death, as the case might be. The sleepy coachmen drawing up their horses in the wide and silent street, where the fair light of morning fell already.

Four! The last guests gone; the last sleepy footman closing his carriage-door upon torn lace and crumpled flowers; and the last sleepy coachman driving his horses from before the lighted mansion. A chilly silence, which must have crept in with the dawn, had fallen upon the gorgeous rooms. Phoebe was actually shivering when she ran back into the deserted ball-room to look for her cloak. In an instant her searching gaze was intercepted.

"Honor," she whispered, hurrying anxiously up to where her cousin sat with her face hidden among the pillows of a couch. "Honor, darling, what is it? Honor, dear," she pleaded again, in the silence, "what is it?"

Her vocabulary was not varied, but her tone was anxious, and Honor raised her head and smiled.

"Is it," questioned Phoebe, inquisitive in all her sympathy, "because Mr. Keith did not come?"

"I am tired, Phoebe. I—think that is all."

"And no wonder you are tired, Honor, I'm sure," exclaimed Miss Owen; "such a splendid ball, and you did your part so nicely, too." "But still," she added, watching Honor's efforts to cast off this dreamy sadness, "it is strange about Mr. Keith. He accepted your invitation, and sent no excuse afterwards. Yet he has always been so courteous that if he had known he could not come, I'm sure he would have——"

"He did not care to come, I think," said Honor, and rose as wearily as if half a century, instead of half a day, had rolled over her since she had raced up and down the stairs with Phoebe.

"Oh! Honor," cried the elder cousin, quite ready to turn the conversation, "what a successful ball it has been! As Hervey says, everything you arrange must be a success. He

says he never enjoyed a ball so much in his life, and though my experience hasn't been very large, as you will say, I say so, too, as seriously as he said it. How kind you were to him to-night, Honor, and yet——"

"What?" asked Honor, absently, when she paused.

"I was going to say," replied Phoebe, "and yet you never seemed before so utterly unconscious of his attentions, and were only kind to every one the same."

"You were kind to Hervey, too, I'm glad to say, dear little Frau," said Honor, ready, as she always was, to sympathise with every feeling of others, let her own thoughts or pain be what it would.

"To-morrow," whispered Phoebe, when the girls parted at last in Honor's dressing-room, "Mr. Keith is to be one of Lady Somerson's party for the Opera, and he will explain his absence to-night."

"Yes," said Honor, gently, as she returned

her cousin's kiss, and knew the words had been said to cheer her. "Perhaps he will."

It may have been that anticipation which had brought the brilliance back to her eyes when she stood beside Phoebe's bed, in the bright summer noon.

"Up already!" exclaimed Miss Owen, rising to a sitting posture, and gazing astonished into the bright, sweet face.

"I have been up a long time," smiled Honor; "I have been walking in the gardens. It is such a beautiful morning, Phoebe."

"We have four engagements for to-day," cried Miss Owen. "Oh! I'm glad you woke me, Honor. I will ring at once."

All that day there was an excitement about Honor which puzzled Phoebe not a little; an excitement which made her beauty dazzling to many eyes that night, when she sat in Lady Somerson's box at Drury Lane, and waited, to all seeming, only for the rising of the curtain.

"Honor"—Sir Philip was whispering to her

from his seat behind—"Keith was to have joined us here to-night, but I suppose we shall be disappointed, as we were last night. Of course you understand his absence, though we do not?"

"No, Sir Philip."

A look of surprise passed between the baronet and his wife.

"Then who can do so?" wondered Lady Somerson.

"I——" but Honor's answer broke off into a subdued exclamation as the orchestra struck up the opening bars of the overture. "It is *Faust*! I—I forgot."

Lady Somerson looked down wonderingly into her favourite's face. She had no remembrance of that night at Deergrove when Royden Keith had asked her to sing as Marguerite to his Faust; and she could not understand why the girl's face should grow so white and sad. Of course Honor had heard the opera often, both abroad and at home, but never, as now, had it brought back, with a vivid reality,

that summer evening when, in his quiet, masterly way, he had made her sing with him, and made that singing different from all other singing she had ever joined in.

Lady Somerson grew unaccountably anxious and ill at ease; and but that she saw Honor had no wish to leave the theatre, she would willingly herself have forfeited the opera, that she might take the girl away. No; though so white and still, Honor sat engrossed, breathing softly, and drinking in, with intense sympathy, the passion and the pathos of the music, and of the scenes before her.

The curtain fell at last, and the hearts that had ached, and the eyes that had wept, met each other with smiles and jests. But Honor's face had not regained its colour, nor had the dreamy sadness left her eyes, though she received with pleasant thanks the eagerly-offered attentions of the gentlemen who clustered into Sir Philip's box, hating each other piously during the doubtful moments before Sir Philip came to

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the fore, and frankly chose her an escort.

"You will go home with Lady Somerson to supper, Honor, won't you?" whispered Phoebe.

"She asked us because we are going with her to Lord Selie's, and it will be so nice. Will you?"

"If you wish it," said Honor, gently; and they went.

But Lady Somerson, in her kind-heartedness, saw more than Phoebe did, and more than Hervey, who, to his delight, was included in the invitation to Sir Philip's "Opera supper." She knew, too, what Honor would like; so, when the time came for them to adjourn to Lord Selie's assembly (in which she knew only too well that the old programme would be repeated, and that Honor must receive the ever-recurring routine of flattery and pursuit) Lady Somerson coolly announced her intention of staying at home, smiling a little, just as if she had done a clever thing, when she placidly received Honor's request to stay with her.

As the girl's own chaperon was not of Lady Somerson's party that night, Phoebe was placed under Sir Philip's especial care, but, at the last moment, she turned with a touch of self-denial which Honor was quick to appreciate.

"Let me stay with you," she whispered, "or let us go home together. I can see that you are tired, and not well. I would rather go home with you, Honor."

"Why, my dear little Frau," said Honor, brightly, "I am staying at home for my own pleasure, and it will be quite spoiled unless you go for yours. Good night. Good night, Hervey. No need to say I hope you will enjoy yourselves."

Captain Trent stood dubiously and dolefully beside her, trying in vain to make her comprehend how impossible for him was any enjoyment in which she did not participate, and how much happier he would be to stay with her. But this was Lady Somerson's house, and he had been invited with the understanding that

he was engaged afterwards, as were the whole party. So Hervey, still a salient worshipper of good form, knew that such communication would be in bad taste.

Sir Philip Somerson had, for the first few minutes, wondered over his wife's change of plan, but her motive had then dawned upon him, and he took Phoebe under his protection, in his courtly, genial way.

When she and Honor were left alone together, Lady Somerson, moved by some incontrollable impulse, put her arms about the girl who, though so rich and idolised, was young and motherless. Then she kissed her softly, and began to chat in a tone which seemed quite easy in its intense kindness.

"Now, Honor, darling, you and I are going to have a quiet, enjoyable time, but I am so liberally endowed with that essentially feminine virtue which laid Eden waste, that I must take one step before I can experience any 'peace of mind, dearer than all.' First of all I ring for

tea; no two women ever did sit down to spend a few hours together without requiring tea, did they? But I am ringing for another purpose, too, for I want to send a message of inquiry to Jermyn Street."

She did not glance towards Honor either as she spoke or while she gave the message to the footman, but when she did look she fancied there was more of relief upon the girl's face than surprise.

"Yes," she continued, standing at the tea-table, as the door closed behind the servant; "I must satisfy my womanly inquisitiveness, and I do not expect one of my own sex to blame me—remember that, my dear."

A whole hour passed before the man returned with his tidings, and that hour the two friends spent pleasantly, as two friends can spend an hour in ease and indolence, when no gaunt secret or mist of suspicion and distrust hovers between them.

"What is it?"

The servant had returned, and Lady Somerson turned her head lazily, as it seemed, for his message; yet she need hardly have schooled her face, for Honor's eyes—lustrous in their great and speechless anxiety—were fixed only upon this possible bearer of a message from Royden Keith.

“I saw Mr. Pierce, my lady, as you wished. He was very anxious. He had sent off one of Mr. Keith's grooms to Westleigh Towers to inquire if his master was there, and another to Kinbury; he himself was just coming here to see Sir Philip—even late as it is. He is alarmed, I think, my lady, about his master.”

“What do you mean? What did he say—exactly?”

Honor's eyes had not stirred from the man's face; her hands were locked together in her lap, and her breath came quickly and irregularly as she waited.

“He said, my lady, that last night, just as Mr. Keith was going to start to Kensington, to

Miss Craven's ball, a message was brought him which was to be delivered specially and privately to himself, and so which of course Mr. Pierce did not hear. He said, my lady, that this message must have changed all his master's plans, for he went out at once with the messenger, never mentioning where he was going, or when he should return. The messenger was a woman, my lady, which Mr. Pierce thought very curious, and suspicious; and he is sure his master intended to return directly, because he only put an over-coat on, and went as he was, in full dress. Yet he did not return, my lady—he never has returned."

CHAPTER II.

Suffer love : a good epithet ! I do suffer love indeed, for
I love thee against my will.

Much Ado About Nothing.

IN the pretty blue sitting-room, to which only a very few of Miss Craven's friends ever penetrated, Phoebe Owensat next morning; looking out upon the passers-by, yet without criticising or studying their dress, as it had been her wont to do. In fact she only looked down upon them by force of habit, and hardly saw them as she did so. There lay a new novel on the window-seat beside her, but for almost an hour its pages had not been turned.

Phoebe was thinking. It was a new art she had

acquired, and it sat rather unfamiliarly upon her, but still the power lent her fair Dutch face a charm which it had never possessed while all her thought had been concentrated on her own shallow plans. Phoebe could feel now how those old years had been wasted; and while she felt, as she often did, that the evil could never be undone, she was unconsciously undoing it. That regret for her own selfish and useless girlhood had only fluttered regretfully through her thoughts to-day, for they had been centred in loving anxiety upon her cousin.

“I cannot understand it,” she mused, leaning her head upon one plump hand, “I wish I could, and I wish I could help her. But somehow it seems as if no one could help her; while she, even in her own anxiety, seems helping us all. She never even pretended to go to bed last night—this morning I mean, for I was late returning, though Honor had promised to wait for me at Lady Somerson’s. I went to bed and

fell asleep at once, never guessing that Honor was not in bed too. And her maid says she changed her dress, and sat quite still in her own room, reading and thinking, until it was possible to send for Mr. Stafford. Does she really think that he can explain this mysterious disappearance of Mr. Keith? Why should it alarm her—for that it does I am quite sure, though she smiles and only says ‘perhaps he was called suddenly abroad.’ As if that were possible, and his valet not even know of it. How I wish Honor would come in here! She said she would, so I will wait, but she is a long time. Mr. Stafford has been here an hour or more. I wish she would come; but I wish, above all things, that I could help her.”

And the wish was earnest and unselfish, as few of Phœbe’s wishes had ever been before, and she had little idea—as she mused of the change in Honor—of the still greater, though so different, change in herself.

“Yes, I will wait, because Honor said she

would come." And for the twentieth time she took up her book to read, while her eyes were raised to the door every minute, and her ears were open for the sound of a light footfall.

Phoebe had said truly that the lawyer had been for more than an hour closeted with Honor, but even when he rose to go, he had not dispelled the puzzled sadness on her face, and had gathered a great concern on his own.

"It is too long ago, Miss Craven," he said, again and again, most regretfully. "Except in the very improbable case of a confession from a possible murderer, no clue to hang suspicion on another can arise now. I have done all that can be done, so far as I may say so, but I have not met with the faintest shadow of success, and I fear I must add that I do not expect ever to do so."

"You will not cease this effort you are making?" urged Honor.

"I will not indeed," he answered, with gentle cordiality, grieved to see what he thought such

futile earnestness, and knowing that, in spite of his great anxiety to serve her, he was powerless to do so in this matter.

"I know you will not, I know you are very kind," she said, wistfully and humbly enough to show that it was possible to be young and beautiful and wealthy, yet to have the longing of the heart unsatisfied ; "and I feel that it will be possible—only so very hard—to prove at last the innocence of Gabriel Myddelton, my cousin."

With a new curiosity in his keen gaze, the old lawyer looked down upon his client.

"It would be wiser, my dear Miss Craven, to let the matter rest. But as you evidently think otherwise," he added, changing his tone when he saw her eyes sadden, "I will think otherwise, as far as I can—at any rate, we will do all that is possible. One of my clerks is at Abbotsmoor now, but, as I told you, his searches and inquiries seem utterly unavailing.

She thanked him for all his help and promises,



and he made a kind, vain effort to cheer her; then he went away with his thoughts so full of the sad young face and earnest voice that he started from his long reverie in surprise to find that he had been driven two miles beyond his office door.

Left alone again, Honor tried to draw her thoughts away from this haunting subject.

"I will go to Phoebe," she said, and yet she lingered in her solitude, struggling with her restlessness and uneasiness.

"You know whom alone I could ever ask to be my wife; and knowing this, you understand what a lonely life mine will be."

The words came back to her just as Royden had uttered them at Westleigh Towers nearly two years before, and she could not shake off their memory. She sat down to the piano and began to play, hoping that the chords might silence these words, but somehow they fitted to them all. Suddenly she rose with a sigh of pain, for her hands and thoughts—straying

after melodies she knew—had unconsciously fallen upon the sad but exquisite funeral music of *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and its pathos and tenderness were more than she could bear just now.

Covering her face with her hands, she tried to shame away these haunting thoughts of Royden. She tried to bring him before her as a man who lived with a false character, under a false name and false pretences, but he would not live so in her mind even for one minute, and she knew that, under all her pain for him, most strong and steadfast was the longing to see him.

“I will go to Marie,” she said at last, rising and pushing the hair from her white face; “she will wonder why I have not been.”

Marie Verrien rose from her work when Honor entered the neat and pretty little room, and moved to meet her. This she did each day now, to show, in eager gratitude, how her strength was truly—though so very

gradually—returning to her, in her new life of ease and abundance.

“A little further again to-day, Marie,” said Honor, her own sorrows set aside, as they always were, beside the sorrow and the joy of others. “It is wonderful ; you will walk down-stairs soon.”

“It is a little further to-day, Miss Craven,” said the lame girl, looking proudly back along the few yards she had walked. “I had grown frightened, wondering why you did not come, and that made me walk further, being so rejoiced to see you coming in.”

Honor gently led the girl back to her seat, then sat with her, talking of her work, her reading, her thoughts, a hundred things which cheered Marie, and made the time pass deliciously, until the hour for the poor girl to be wheeled out into the sunshine, as she was wheeled at Honor's wish every day ; this change being an inexpressible treat to one who had so much of “lying still” in her life.

"You have been writing, I suppose, Marie?" said Honor, pointing to an open desk, which had been a present from Lady Lawrence to the girl to whom she had often chosen, for purposes of her own, to give hard words.

"No, Miss Honor," said Marie, with one of her frequent attacks of shyness, "I have not been writing. I have only been looking at my photographs. I have but three, but those three I can never look at too often. You remember this, Miss Craven?"

As she spoke, she took from her desk a photograph Honor had seen one day in the little kitchen at East Cottage, and she laid it gently in Honor's outstretched hand.

"I have seen it," said Honor, hurriedly, and passed it back.

But in the next instant she had drawn her hand towards her again, and had bent her eyes gravely on the picture. There sat Royden on his own wide solitary hearth, with his dogs about him, and a deep thoughtfulness within

his eyes; and as she looked those words rushed back again, and filled her eyes with tears—

“Knowing this, you understand what a lonely life mine must be.”

With a lingering gesture which was pitifully tender, she laid the photograph back in its place. Then she took up an inartistic portrait of Marie's father, and talked brightly and pleasantly of the little Frenchman, until Marie's heart was full of loving pride and pleasure; and until a servant came to summon her, and Honor nodded a bright good-bye.

Phoebe was not alone when Honor joined her after Marie's departure. Captain Trent had just been admitted, and was now, like Phoebe, watching the door for Honor's entrance. She welcomed him with all her old brightness, though not with her old raillery, and in a few minutes the cousins were chatting pleasantly together, though Phoebe's curious eyes were not satisfied with Honor's smile, nor did the ears of Captain Trent deceive him when he missed some ring of bright-

ness in her tone. So thoroughly happy she made them in her presence, though—as she always could do—that they were only half convinced of their fancies.

The Duchess of Hartreigh, a pompous old lady, whose one strong effort through this season had been to forward her son's eager courtship of the girl-millionaire, called at luncheon time, and so Hervey stayed too, and they had quite a merry meal; but nothing would persuade Honor to accept the Duchess's urgent entreaty that she would take a seat in her carriage for the Park, where—after allowing due time for her shopping—the wily old lady knew that her son would be waiting to join them.

“But you will go with *us*, Honor?” pleaded Phoebe, when the ducal vehicle had rolled pompously away. “Our presence was your excuse, so it will be quite natural for you to go with us.”

“Quite natural,” assented Honor, tiredly;

“but I would rather—I do not care for that crowd in the Park to-day, Phoebe.”

Still, when she saw a cloud fall on Phoebe's face at this refusal, she changed her mind. It would give her cousin real enjoyment, as it always did, and the chief pleasure which Honor's unselfish nature knew was that of rendering others happy. So, with a smile and kiss, she promised to go ; and, as they drove round and round the well-worn track—Hervey only one now of the many gentlemen who sought a footing, for himself or his horse, beside the splendid carriage—many an envious thought and glance were given her by hearts far lighter, and eyes that had never known such tears as Honor had shed that day.

“May I come in to-night?” asked Hervey, when he parted from them at the door. “I am under a promise to dine with my aunt and Theodora, but may I come to you afterwards?”

“No,” smiled Honor, “you ought to stay with them. I suppose it is of no use my sending

any message to Theo, she has quite cut off all old acquaintanceship with us?"

"Lucky thing for you," put in Captain Trent, briskly.

"So has Jane," continued Honor, not heeding his remark. "I have had such a very emphatic refusal of my last invitation to her."

"Another lucky thing for you. I shall come, Honor, please," he urged, with perseverance. "If the house is closed, I can but go back to my own quarters."

CHAPTER III.

I will (he cried), so help me God ! destroy
That villain Archimage. (*the demon of indolence.*)

THOMSON.

HONOR and Phoebe were alone together when Captain Trent came in, after his visit to Mrs. and Miss Trent in Harley Street. The girls had spent a quiet evening at home, and though Phoebe had looked upon herself in the light of a voluntary martyr when she had insisted on staying at home, because Honor would, she found she was very thoroughly enjoying the novelty of an unengaged night.

She looked into Hervey's face when he enter-

ed, and in a moment betrayed her surprise, for it was evident that he had been terribly excited.

Honor had looked up too when he entered, and saw the change in an instant; but this change hardly seemed to surprise her. The traces of angry excitement improved him, and the restraint which he had evidently put upon himself, gave a new strength to his features, and a glimpse of steady courage to his face.

"Are they well in Harley Street?" asked Honor, when, without his characteristic languor, he had taken a seat beside her.

"Yes, quite well—thank you, Honor."

The last words were uttered in his usual tone, but the first were sharply, almost viciously, spoken. Then he fell into a moody silence, while Honor wondered whether he wished to tell them what was vexing him, or whether he might think it an intrusion on his thoughts; and while Phoebe sat quite still, and by the absence of her vague and gushing questions showed to him, more plainly than aught else could have

shown it, the change which these last few months had wrought in her.

"I was afraid you would have engagements for to-night," he said, presently.

"Honor did not wish to go out," replied Phoebe, quietly, "so I would not."

Another proof of the change in her, and Hervey was not slow to appreciate it.

"I—have had a nice evening," he said, sarcastically; betraying at once not only his willingness to tell all they could wish to hear about himself, but even his anxiety to do so. "Honor, just think of my aunt seizing upon me directly I arrived, and hinting—very strongly *hinting*, if it could be called anything really short of plainly speaking out—that it was high time for me to arrange about my marriage! She supposed I should never be any richer—or a more desirable husband—than I am now, and so it was childish to wait any longer. Of course she had hoped that I should have been old Myddelton's heir; but that since——"

"Never mind," said Honor, quietly, when Hervey, strangling the words upon his lips, rose excitedly and paced to and fro in the room. "It would be better not to tell us at all, Hervey; but certainly do not repeat what relates to me."

"How she dare say it!" fumed Hervey. "I—it was no wonder I lost command over myself, and told her a little—I'm sorry now to remember how little it was—of my opinion of her."

"Hush, Hervey—do not tell us that."

"I must," he cried; "I must tell you, Honor. I must tell both of you, for the words seem bursting from me, and—and there are resolutions struggling behind, which I must utter aloud to you. No one ever helps me but you, Honor—do let me tell. Theo herself came in then, and—and I really do not quite know what she said. She supposed that we were to marry; she had always supposed it; and it was just as well it should be now—a marriage in


the season was a little less of a bore than a marriage out of the season; and as it had always seemed to be an arranged plan—— Bah! I can repeat no more of her cold, selfish, heartless words. Honor, there has never been one word of marriage uttered between us——never, on my honour as a gentleman; and why should there be now, when the prospect of a future spent with Theodora would hang over me like a curse. I told her——”

“Hervey,” pleaded Honor, gently, “I wish you would not tell us.”

“I must,” he answered, stopping to entreat her patience by a glance. “At least,” he went on, modifying his words, when he saw how thoroughly she was in earnest, “I will not tell you all she said, for it is too contemptible even to be remembered; but I must tell you that I did not utter one taunting reminder of her pursuit of Royden Keith, when she taunted me of——taunted me, and stung me almost to madness.”

"Sit down, Hervey," said Honor, gently, "and ring the bell, please. We will have one of the *petits soupers* you like so much.

"Oh, Honor," he panted, standing before her for a moment, "such a scene as that would have roused any man. To be expected to live all your life with a woman who cannot utter one kind word of those who are dearer to you than life itself, and to find so suddenly that you are as much to blame as she! Oh, Honor, what a lazy, inert, selfish life I have led! How can I blame Theodora for taking my bondage for granted, when I made no effort to prove myself free? It all came back to me so wretchedly to-night; and, but for the lessons I have learnt in this dear home of yours, I should have been more unmanly than I have ever been. But your lessons and your help have not been all in vain, Honor; and, though I grew half-maddened there, I did not speak a word that even *you* might not have heard; and though, in my anger, I declared I should tell you what they



said of you, I have not done so—I would not have done so, even if you had not silenced me. As for what Theo said of Phœbe——”

“Does not your promise for silence hold good as regards Phœbe too?” inquired Honor, smiling, as she laid her hand on Phœbe’s.

“Yes. I told them I wished they could see how different she was from——”

“Come, Hervey, do ring. We are hungry. See how late it is ; and Phœbe has been playing to me for hours.”

“Honor always pretends she likes me to play to her,” put in Phœbe, deprecatingly ; “but of course she only pretends. Mine are all stupid pieces, and I play them generally wrong, too.”

“Phœbe,” said Hervey, pausing before her, and speaking with a glimpse of simple, courageous earnestness, which showed him in the colours of true manliness at last, “neither you nor I can ever know why Honor is so good to us ; for, in old times, I galled her

with my shallow patronage, and you allowed her to deny herself perpetually for you. We—we can only gratefully accept her goodness, and try—as I will try harder than ever from to-night—to repay her in the way she likes best. Don't cry, Phœbe," he added, while the tears were very near his own eyes too; "don't be offended with me for the thoughtless words I have said to-night. Let us be good friends always. May we?"

"Yes, yes," cried Phœbe, heartily, as she laid her plump little hand in Hervey's proffered palm; "and you will not think of me according to what Theodora says, Hervey?"

"Never. I will think of you only according to my own judgment; or, better still, according to what Honor says."

"You think of Honor," whispered Phœbe, softly, "as your good angel, Hervey."

"I do," he answered, thoughtfully; "I have cause to do so when I recollect from what she saved me. I have tried to be different—I have,

indeed—but from to-night I will try harder still. I will waste no more days in self-love and indolence—no more! Will you take my hand, Honor, in registration of that vow?”

Mutely Phoebe sat and waited. After Honor's ready hand-clasp and cheering words, would he seek hers too?

Yes; he came towards her in this new, quiet earnestness of his, and held his hand for hers.

“I think,” said Phoebe, softly, “that you will not regret this scene with Theodora, Hervey.”

Nor did he.

The dainty little supper was quite a cheerful meal, while still Honor's ears were, as they had been all day, keenly and painfully alive to every sound, and her eyes had a dreamy, waiting look, lying ever behind their warm, bright smile.

The cousins were standing together, about to separate, when the peal of the visitors' bell woke the silence of the house. Honor, unconscious what she did, started back with one

quick, indrawn breath; and both to Hervey and to Phoebe, then, was it plain that she had dreaded tidings of some kind. They saw her face grow deadly white, though the name announced was a friendly and familiar one—

“ Sir Philip Somerson.”

They saw her strive, as she went forward to meet him, to hide the anxiety which burned almost feverishly in her beautiful eyes. They saw that the Baronet met her very gravely and very pitifully; and, seeing this, they knew that the tidings which he bore could not be happy ones.

CHAPTER IV.

He prayeth best who loveth best
 All things both great and small ;
 For the great God who loveth us,
 He made and loveth all.

COLERIDGE.

TWO nights before this, Royden Keith, just as he had finished dressing for Honor Craven's ball, had been inquired for by a stranger.

"A woman, sir—and she will not give her message to me."

So Pierce had said, and Royden, without demur, had sent for her to his presence.

"I am come, sir," said the woman, giving her message a little hurriedly; "from one who is dying, and who prays to see you first. She

bade me give no name. I was only to say this —Would you give further help to the mother whose child you once saved ?”

“I remember,” said Royden, without any hesitation. “I will come.”

He did not give utterance to the surprise he felt at hearing that the woman who had seemed to shrink from him each time he saw her at Abbotsmoor, and had secretly eluded him at last, to escape to London, had yet sought him out, and sent for him in her last hour. He saw that this messenger was in total ignorance of all save her own errand ; and he saw, too, that she was anxious to return. So he threw a loose grey coat over his evening dress, and followed her. She started on in front, as if she knew only the task of acting as guide, but he soon overtook her and called a cab.

“Please stop in St. Paul’s Churchyard,” she said to the cabman, in a quick, business-like voice ; and Royden wondered how it could be that the timid, country-bred woman from that

cottage in the green lanes near Abbotsmoor, could have voluntarily come to live in the very heart of the city.

"I told him to stop here," Royden's guide said when they left the cab, and turned into Dean's Court, "because the wheels sound so noisy sometimes, however high up the rooms may be. This way please, sir."

They walked for a few minutes along narrow thoroughfares, whose only radiance was their tavern windows, then stopped before a tall, gaunt house whose lower windows were all dark.

Following the light his guide carried, Royden climbed the steep, bare stairs, flight after flight, until she stood before a closed door, and waited for him.

"This is the room, sir," she whispered; "I am not coming in, but I will be ready if you want me. I live a few doors lower down the street, but she and me" (pointing to the closed door) "made friends a bit, finding trouble had

visited us both. I like to do all I can for her, just as I believe she would have done it for me; so I'll wait below, sir, and be ready if you call me. Margaret my name is—so is hers, and that drew us together a bit, too. It takes no stronger a tie than that sometimes, to draw together two that, but for each other, might starve up here, and die without a friendly word or glance. *Margaret, sir, don't forget."*

She turned away without waiting for any answer, and Royden looked after her pitifully. Surely here a helping hand and heart were needed!

He quietly opened the door to which he had been guided, and found himself in a small room, neat and clean, but holding no occupant. Opposite him another door stood ajar, and when he had knocked upon that, a slow and heavy voice bade him come in.

In this room a woman lay upon a small bed, facing the open window, before which a candle burned steadily in the heavy city atmosphere of

the June night. In a moment he recognised the face upon the pillows, though the cheeks were gaunt and hollow, and the eyes (beyond their old hunted look) had a feverish fire in their depths, as they rested fixedly upon a child who lay sleeping in a tiny bed beside her own.

"I am come," said Royden, in his kind and quiet tones; and he laid his fingers on the burning hand which rested heavily upon the coverlet.

The dying woman's eyes turned swiftly from the child, and fastened themselves upon the handsome, pitiful face beside her. Royden drew a chair up to the bed, and sat there easily; just as if waiting were not wearisome to him.

"How is the boy?" he asked, pleasantly meeting the steady gaze.

"Well," she answered, the word dropping slowly from her dry lips. "Well, but you saved him—only to be left—alone—at last."

"Alone? Is there no one——"

"No one," she answered, the words were a terrible effort to her, as her eyes grew wider in their speechless questioning. "What can—I do?"

"Your kind neighbour," suggested Royden, his thoughts wandering from the words he uttered.

"No," she answered, moving her hand backwards and forwards in its heavy, restless weakness. "I have no neighbours. I—was afraid of them. You mean the one who fetched you. She is—poor—and sickly. It would be cruel."

"Do not fear, then," said Royden, very quietly. "Your boy shall be taken care of. I promise this."

"He—he has a little money—a little—his father's," she said, a momentary feverish joy brightening her eyes, and fading again as suddenly. "I shall not leave him in poverty. But alone, and in this great world of——"

"He shall not be alone," said Royden. "He shall have care and guidance while he is young, and help when he is older."

She did not answer this, and he even fancied that the longing—terrible in its keen anxiety—of her feverish eyes, grew more and more intense now that his promise was given. Some anguished doubt was weighing on her mind, as he saw; but how could he help to fathom it, unless he uttered words which should betray his own suspicion?

“The money is there,” she said, pointing to a worn bank-book which lay beside her on the bed. “Take it—and—dying—I know you will keep your—promise. Two years ago, when you saved him—I trusted you; I could not help it; but when you asked me——”

A sudden pause, for her voice failed; but in the long silence that searching gaze grew inexpressibly painful in its mute questioning.


“Margaret,” said Royden, bending above the troubled face, and speaking very low and kindly, “you have something to tell me which you ought to tell before you meet your Judge in Heaven.”

A spasm of pain shot across the hot face, so rapid that in one second it had passed.

"I—cannot—" the words faltered and fell brokenly now through her stiff lips. "I cannot—nor dare—I meet—my Judge."

If it had not been for this unexpected message, Royden Keith would now have been participating in a scene of brilliancy and mirth most utterly opposed to this dying hour, and he would have been gay amongst the gay. But he had no thought now for that scene—no memory of it even. His post of duty lay before him here, and in that earnest, steadfast faith which belonged to him, he was able to brighten and cheer this dying bed, and gently lead the groping soul a little nearer to its God.

"It—is a mist," she said, raising one hand for a moment, as if she would cut through the space before her, while Royden whispered to her of Him Who is always waiting to pardon and save; Who not only standeth at the door in His great patience, but knocketh untiringly.



"I know He is there—I have known it for years, but I—I want to feel His hand, to see His face, and—and *something* is between us."

Again the words ended suddenly and shortly, in the raised feverish tones, and the mute, eager question of the dying eyes spoke vaguely and miserably in the silence—a silence broken presently by Royden's voice, as, on his knees beside the bed, he pleaded with the Father for this troubled child. The woman's hard, quick breath was softened as she lay and listened.

"Oh! my dear Lord," she sobbed, when Royden's voice was hushed, "accept that prayer for me."

When he rose, he took a Bible which he saw lying open on a chair, and softly read to her the Saviour's precious words of pardon and of promise. And while he did so, the eyes, which he could not see, lost somewhat of their troubled fixity of gaze, and there struggled into them a gleam of hope.

"She read to me," the woman faltered, with

a faint gesture towards the closed door, "but she read of other things. There was always—the great white Throne—always; and I could see Him there—a Judge, *my* Judge; and she read—it might be only once, but I heard it afterwards in every line—that all liars shall—have their part—ah! I forgot it all while *you* read. I—I saw Him—a Father—ready to pardon me—waiting to pardon me. I—shall see—other things—clearly if—if you help me still."

And while the quiet hours of the June night stole on, Royden's own kind words, and those calm and wondrous words he read, *did* help her.

The candle had burnt down to its socket, and the faint summer dawn was creeping through the open window, when the neighbour who had fetched Royden entered with a cup of tea for the sick woman. Instinctively he made a movement then to leave the room, but suddenly all the wistful, troubled eagerness returned to the wide eyes upon the pillow.

"You go, Margaret," the dying woman cried, with an entreating gesture; "let him stay. I—I have something to tell him."

Yet still, when left again with Royden, she lay in silence, and told nothing.

Then the hours crept on again, until the light fell straight from heaven upon the dying face to which no sleep had come; and to which no sleep could ever come again, until one last touch should close the troubled eyes for ever.

Just as Royden returned to the bedroom, after carrying away the smouldering candle, the little boy awoke; and, waking just as he had fallen asleep, with a vague sense of misery and loneliness upon him, he stretched out his hands to his mother, and sobbed as if his little frame could not contain its load of fear and grief. The mother, powerless in her weakness, saw Royden take the child tenderly within his arms, and heard the sobs grow faint and few at last upon his breast. Then her long watchful silence was broken sharply, a light broke across the

fixed gaze, and with sudden feverish strength she rose in her bed.

"I want—a magistrate!" she cried, and clasped her burning hands. "It is all clear before me now. My child—it was for my child I feared—but he will not suffer. I read that in your face. Ah! God is good—so good—and it is not too late! Let me—see—a magistrate!"

"I will bring one," said Royden, gently putting the child out of his arms.

"No, no," she cried again, "not you, for it may be too late. Let her go. Call her; say 'Margaret,' and she will come. Let her go. She will understand, and she knows London. She will manage, as she managed to—to bring you."

Almost like one in a dream, Royden returned to the sick-room, after having despatched the neighbourly woman who waited to be useful. Was the end of his long search near at last?

"Will he be in time?" moaned the sick woman, when once more he took his place be-

side her, and the little boy crept up and climbed to lay his head upon his shoulder.

"I think so. He will soon be here."

"But I am dying fast, am I not?"

Not for the world would Royden have concealed the truth from one whose every breath might be her last, but he uttered it so kindly, and touched with such faith upon the happiness beyond, that a glance almost as peaceful as a smile shone in her eyes when they met his.

"Let me bid him good-bye."

Royden laid the child upon the bed and turned away. That long, last parting between the mother and son was most sacred in his eyes.

"You have promised," she whispered, wistfully, when Royden came presently to take the child from the bed. "You have promised—to help him—that his life may be different from—his mother's. There is the book—it is but little—yet his father wished——"

"It shall be used wisely for him," Royden

said, holding a cordial to her lips when her voice failed. "Rest in perfect peace. He shall never feel himself uncared for whilst I live."

And now a real smile lighted up the thin, worn face.

"Now—if he will only come—in time—that is all."

He came almost as she spoke—a light-hearted gentleman, who looked upon all magisterial duties as the comedies of life; and yet the dying woman's solemn earnestness infected even him.

"I am much obliged to you for coming," she faltered, humbly. "I will not keep you long. I know what to do—my father told me. I"—moving her hand restlessly about the pillows—"have it here. Margaret, where are you? I can scarcely see. You put it here, when I bid you bring it from my box—for me to burn—before I died. I meant to burn it. I left it to the last; but I—meant to burn it—sealed as it is. I cannot now. He saved my only child—he

helped me, and will help my boy. But for him I should have burnt it, and the truth could never have been known. Where is it—where is it? My strength is going!”

Murmuring soothingly the while, the woman who had brought in the magistrate, moved the pillows one by one, until she found a packet tied and sealed.

“There, there,” cried the dying woman, trying to grasp it in her hot, weak fingers, and looking eagerly up into Royden’s face; “you will understand it. I do not forget how you questioned me of Gabriel Myddelton—the questions from which I fled. It is for you—let me leave it with you—but I have something to do first. Father told me of it. ‘In the presence of a magistrate,’ he said. Now I am ready.”

Formally, with little need of help or direction; and clearly, in spite of her failing breath and feeble tone, she took the packet in her hands; and tenderly touching the Bible which they

gave her, she testified on oath to the truth of what the documents contained. Then, with a sigh which sounded almost happy, she gave the packet into Royden's hand, and turned away her face.

The sun was shining high above the city roofs before the last heavy breath was drawn. She had begged that the boy might not see his mother die, so the neighbour who had been so kind and anxious carried him away to her own room, and Royden was watching alone when the end came, for the doctor had left her, knowing he had no power to do anything further.

Just as Royden closed the dim, wide eyes, the woman who had called herself Margaret noiselessly entered the room.

"Gone!" she whispered sadly. "She did not need me at the last, then, but she needs me now. They are not kind to her downstairs—they never were. They shall not come near her now."

"Then can you and will you wait?" asked Royden, anxiously.

"I will be with her," she said, quietly, touching the white, dead face. "She was always solitary, but she would sometimes like me with her for a little even then. I would not like her to be left alone at all now, and yet, when I have finished here, I must go back to my own room, to leave the little boy safe, and do one or two things more."

"I see," said Royden, as he left the inner room; "then I will wait for your return."

He wrote a few directions, to leave with his card; after which he saw the mistress of the house, and took upon himself the responsibility of all expenses consequent on the death of the poor solitary woman, and the temporary care of her boy. Then, when he was left alone, knowing he had done all he could do, and that his feelings, whatever they might be on opening the papers given him, could not interfere with this duty he had taken upon himself, he sat down in the outer room, and broke the seal and cut the string of the packet left with him.

It contained two separate papers, and though the handwriting on both was the same, the signatures were different. One was unintelligible; the other, written evidently by the hand which penned both papers, was—"MARGARET TERRIT."

CHAPTER V.

It is great sin to swear unto a sin,
But greater sin to keep a sinful oath.

SHAKESPEARE.

ONE o'clock ! The bell of St. Paul's clanged out the note like the opening chord of a great military band, and, in the quavering key of an old man's querulous negative, a Dutch clock upon the stairs of the lodging-house answered the single note. There were more footsteps below than there had been through the morning, for clerks were hurrying to their mid-day meal, and, now and then, a porter hastened past with a solitary chop upon a tray. For a few of the masters in those grim offices

did not leave their posts until the office doors were locked at five o'clock, and they come forth to dissolve in the great misty crowd, and lose all identity until, casting anchor for the night in their several suburban retreats, they assumed an especial individuality in a moment.

Country visitors were strolling to and fro in the Cathedral, silent and open-eyed, but wearing, withal, the encumbered and *distract* expression peculiar to sight-seers who follow conscientiously the beaten track. In the shadow of the great dome, that inexhaustive process of shopping was pursued indefatigably, its linkèd sweetness drawn out to its longest capacity. The confectioners were briskly aware that the business of the day had begun in earnest for them now, while wistful eyes feasted through the glass upon unattainable luxuries.

But, like its shining herald, the day is earlier in the east than in the west, and even then the guests who danced, and laughed, and jested at

Honor Craven's ball last night, had not all risen though the whirl of carriages had begun, and the critical crowd at Burlington House was already leavened with its dainty sprinkling of uncritical beauty and fashion.

Not a few among this crowd looked anxiously for a friend they missed last night; not a few were (later on that day) to look in vain among the faces and figures in the Park, for one whose absence was as disappointing as it was inexplicable. Guesses were hazarded, varied and wide apart enough, yet none fell near the truth; for who could guess that one of the idols of this London season, watched for, waited for, longed for, sat in an attic in this City thoroughfare, deaf to all sounds, and blind to all sights around him, his grave eyes following, with a terrible earnestness, the badly written words upon the paper over which his head was bent? He had unfolded both the papers, and his left hand lay upon the unread one, while his mind grasped promptly, word for

word, the one to which was affixed the man's uncertain signature. And these were the words it bore :—

“I, the undersigned Benjamin Territ, miner, living in Abbotsmoor, and being dangerously ill, yet, nevertheless, possessing all my intellectual faculties, and finding that I am soon about to appear before the Judgment Seat of God, wish to appease the remorse of my conscience, and to do an act of justice, by retracting all I said upon oath against Gabriel Myddelton, in my deposition made at Kinbury, as to his being the murderer of his uncle, Squire Gabriel Myddelton, of Abbotsmoor. I declare before God that that deposition was not true, and that I retract it with all my soul, before God and before justice, and implore the Sovereign Judge, in His mercy, to accept this retractation as being the whole truth.

“This, as well as the following confession, is written by another hand, on account of my inability to write, from accidents received in the

mine; but it is signed by me in my cottage at Abbotsmoor, on this fifth day of December, one thousand eight hundred and sixty-four.

“On the seventh day of March, one thousand eight hundred and sixty-one, young Mr. Gabriel Myddelton told me of the quarrel he had had with his uncle, and how his uncle had made a will which disinherited him. He often came to my cottage, partly because he could never bear solitude, and my company was as pleasant, perhaps, as that of any of the farmers or cottagers upon the dismal estate; and partly because I encouraged him, hoping that I could turn to account the interest he took in my daughter Margaret. She was a handsome girl, far above other girls on the estate, and to the Manor there never came a young girl-face at all. If Gabriel Myddelton would marry Margaret, I thought, I would even promise to leave the neighbourhood, for I knew the young Squire (easy-going as he might be) would not care to acknowledge a minor as his father-in-law. I

should be free to go to what world I chose, and I would take care that Margaret's husband provided me with the money I should need. And if I grew tired of that life abroad, I could still come back and have a farm here; for I knew young Gabriel Myddelton could be easily intimidated.

“But on that day I speak of, he brought an appalling tale. He had quarrelled with his uncle, had been disinherited, and had left Abbotsmoor for ever. He told all this, more to Margaret than to myself; and the girl sat beside the window where he stood, and looked as if something had turned her to stone. But I sat behind, and ate my supper slowly, and did not put in a word. But for all that, when I got up from the table, I had made my resolution; and it was not my way—it never has been—to go away from any resolution I may have made, whatever stood in the way.

“They were early people at Abbotsmoor, and I knew that by ten o'clock the house was

always silent and darkened for the night. I knew the low window of the old Squire's business room—the corner window opening on the bit of level lawn between the shrubbery and the house—and that window I easily opened with my own tools. I remember that I rather enjoyed the work, for I had not much cause to do anything but hate old Squire Myddelton, and I did hate him heartily. I doubt if there was a man, woman, or child on his estate who did anything else; for what had he ever been to us to make us feel otherwise towards him?

“I had but little trouble in forcing my entrance into the room; very little even in opening the secretary where the will lay; but just at the moment when I grasped the packet, and turned to effect my escape from the house, the inner door of the room was opened, and there was the Squire, advancing towards me with a candle in his hand. I acted on my first impulse—what else could I do in the surprise of the moment? I acted on my first impulse, as I

have done all through my life. I dashed the candle from his hand, and then—in the dense darkness, when I felt he could not recognise me—I struck him one deadly blow from my hammer; and, knowing it would do its work on the weak grey head, I left him there upon the floor, and escaped from the window, with the will in my possession. I fled across the lawn, but in the shrubbery beyond I paused a moment to secure the parchment on my person. Then came an instant's horrible shock: the old man, whom I had left for dead, had pursued me! He came up to me running, and I could see the crimson streaks upon his face, and the thirst for vengeance in his failing eyes—a fearless old man in all his meanness. I stood a moment facing him, then, with one well-aimed blow he lay dead upon the grass, and there was no stain of blood upon my hands or clothes.

“I left him lying there, of course, and, hurrying through the wood, reached my own cottage

an hour afterwards, from quite an opposite direction.

“Gabriel Myddelton could better tell the rest, as his counsel told it for him at his trial, when my words and Margaret’s, and the facts which others added, made the tale of no avail. He had returned from Kinbury that night, to ask his uncle’s pardon. He had taken his way through the wood, intending to gain admission to the Squire’s room through the very window I had opened, that the servants might not know of his return at all, if his uncle did not forgive him. In the wood, he had found his uncle lying, and, astonished and alarmed at what he thought must be a sudden illness, he had raised the old man’s head in his arms. What he saw I need not tell, though I am dictating this confession as fully as possible, for a relief to my burdened conscience.


“A horrible fear seized young Gabriel Myddelton, that the suspicion of this foul deed would fall upon himself. He saw even then the

chain of evidence against him which rally brought him at last to the cell of a doomed criminal.

“Timid as he was by nature, there was but one course he could decide upon. He fled from that spot in the wood as if his uncle’s fate awaited him there; and he never stopped in his flight until he reached my cottage, and found protection and help—as he fancied. He washed the blood from his hands, burned his stained wrist-bands, and changed the coat on which the old man’s head had fallen and left its traces.

“Margaret told all this at the trial, and I stood by, and knew the words would hang him. But he himself had another explanation of the tale to give, and now I swear that *his* was the truth; and ours, though in many respects true to the letter, held a lie in every word.

“I helped him that night, simply that I might know where he lurked; for, from the first, I had determined that suspicion must rest upon him.



All my old plans were frustrated by this unnecessary and inconvenient murder, and personal safety now was my one motive in every action. In my first fear, I had begun to destroy the will, but now I thought of a fiendishly skilful plan. The fragments of the will which disinherited him, should be found in his possession, and he should be overtaken in his endeavour to escape. This, with what my daughter and I could tell, would fix the crime upon him; and not for a moment did the betrayal of his confidence weigh with me, beside my terror lest my own guilt should be discovered.

“The rest all followed as I had planned and foreseen. What I have told is known only to myself and my daughter, and I have heard her solemn oath that she will add her confession to mine. After I had sworn to Gabriel Myddelton's guilt—yes, from the very first—I grew a changed and miserable man; and this excruciating daily death which I have suffered since the clay fell upon me in the mine,

is, I know, but a just punishment for my crime.

"Now—solemnly, as if in the presence of my God—I swear that this is truth, and confirmed, upon oath, in the presence of my daughter Margaret, in whose hands I leave it.

"(Signed) BENJAMIN TERRIT."

Royden raised his head, and for a minute or two looked dreamily around the room. The door of the chamber of the dead was locked, as he had locked it. The sounds in the street below were but faint and far-off. Without a change in the intent gravity of his eyes, he leaned forward again in the silence, and read the second paper.

"Possibly these words will never be read by any eyes save my own, for I only write them because my father extorted an oath from me that I should do so, and leave them to be made public after my death. With whom can I leave them? Gabriel Myddelton, even if he is still alive, is too far away to be either hurt or helped by this

confession—even if it were made public to-morrow. I am young and strong, and may wait years for death to visit me. And when it does, who will be near me, to bear this release to Gabriel Myddelton?


“But I have promised it shall be written, and I will keep the oath my father made me swear, as I kept that other oath he wrung from me three years ago. The task of writing his confession has been hard and sore, but to write my own will be far harder. My father looks upon his bodily suffering as his punishment; but no punishment which could be given me on earth, could relieve me from the load of guilt which has been secretly and slowly killing me since I met that one glance of Gabriel Myddelton's, whilst the judge pronounced upon him the sentence of death. My father almost seems to feel that he is pardoned for his share in this vile deed; I wish I dared to hope that when I stand upon that awful threshold of the door of death, I might feel that I too am pardoned. The

weight of guilt has borne me down and isolated me among my fellow-creatures, and it will weigh me down and isolate me to the end.

“I have very little to add to my father’s confession. What I told at the trial about Mr. Myddelton’s assuming a disguise at our cottage was true in every particular. What I did *not* tell, was his confession to us, so honestly given, and which my father has related. He threw himself upon our mercy, and we betrayed him, and swore away his life. That thought stings me, even now, with a pain worse than death!

“It was an unnatural and unencouraged thought of mine, but I should have said, up to the day of that trial, that I would have laid down my life for Gabriel Myddelton. Then I proved its falseness by laying his life waste instead, and my fear of my father’s threats and anger, and my submission to his command of obedience, are no excuse for me.

“I heard the sentence of death passed upon him. Through three heavy days and wakeful



nights, I pictured him within those walls, a convicted felon, and I thought my life had burned itself out in the passion of that anguish, and that my doom was sealed as certainly as his.

“I had a lover then who was warder in the Kinbury jail, and though I had never listened to him before, I listened now, for one plan and resolution had filled my mind. If he would save Gabriel Myddelton's life—so I told him—I would be his wife when he chose. Ah! surely that was the least that I could do for the man whose name we had blighted, and whose life we had lied away.

“We helped each other, and until the last moment came, no other thought was allowed to either of us. It was no new thing to me to lie awake at night and think of Gabriel Myddelton, but it was new to him, and I saw the change telling upon him, though I was proud to feel that no sense of either fear or honour would turn him from my will.

“The day and the hour came at last, and

though my face was white as death that morning when I rose, I felt more nearly happy than I had felt since that night when Gabriel Myddelton's confidence in us had been so vilely abused.

"My husband—he was my husband on the following day—hired for me a large, low dog-cart, closed at the back, and a fleet but very quiet-looking pony. In this cart I drove myself alone into Kinbury, and, calling a boy who stood in the yard of the jail (a boy brought there by my husband for this especial purpose, though he looked to be only idling there), gave the pony into his charge. He stood steadily at its head, his back to the door and to the vehicle, and I passed in with the order my husband had obtained for me, and was admitted by himself into the condemned cell. What could be feared from me, when it was so well-known that I had done most of all to bring the criminal to that cell?

"I wore two shawls and two dresses exactly the same, one concealed below the other; and

under my skirt I had secreted a bonnet, veil, and gloves, precisely the same as those I wore myself.

“My husband had been for days cleverly acting his part, and his fellow-officials now knew him to be thoroughly imbued with a disgust for old Myddelton's convicted murderer, and a demonstratively staunch belief in the justice of his sentence. So it was that no breath of suspicion attached to either of us, and permission was readily granted me to see Gabriel Myddelton, on the plea that I had lived near him all my life, and we had been children together.

“By skilful means, my husband attracted the turnkeys as far as possible from the passage to the cell, though of course they stayed where they could see me walk back to the dog-cart. I passed out, and then passed back again to the cell.

“‘Forgotten something,’ muttered my husband, turning carelessly away, ‘but at any rate

I'm glad she is going. Poor lass! How bitterly she cries! Well, he was lord of the manor, you see, on which she has lived all her life.

"It was as I *seemed* to pass weeping from the cell, that my husband, by a great effort, kept the attention of the men engrossed by describing and illustrating very elaborately the breaking of the window through which the murderer had passed into Abbotsmoor. Then, after a few minutes, a sudden recollection struck him, and he turned sharply round.

"Of course you are watching," he said suspiciously, to one of the men.

"Of course," was the answer, though the man's eyes could not have done double duty. "I've seen her pass backwards and forwards two or three times, but she is back in the cell now, and you had better go, for her time is up."

"They watched my husband pass into the cell, and then lead me out, crying still. They watched him help me to my seat in the dog-

cart, and give me the reins, and ask if I feared to go alone. They all spoke kindly to me, and stood to watch me drive away—alone—as I had come.

“And so the tale was told next day, by others who had seen me. I had driven away *alone*, as I had come. How were they to know that Gabriel Myddelton, dressed exactly as I had been, lay hidden in the back of the low, old-fashioned vehicle? That in that going to and fro, between the dog-cart and the cell, there had been one time when my husband's energies were put to their severest test, while a female figure (weeping bitterly) had passed out and slipped into that waiting cavity. It was just one minute afterwards that my husband fetched me, and helped me to my seat.

“I had a fresh disguise in the gig, and in that Gabriel Myddelton parted from me, when I had driven him as far as I dared to venture on the high road to Liverpool.

“Not until late at night was the prisoner

missed, and then he was safe. My husband knew a man in Liverpool, who earned his livelihood by helping those who strove to get abroad in secret, and he had been prepared and bribed. So we heard from him of Gabriel Myddelton's departure for America. Since then no tidings have ever reached me, and now I know that they never will. I feel that after my death it will be too late for this confession to benefit anyone, yet I dare not make it known before.

"This is the declaration which I have sworn to make, and to enclose with that which my father has dictated to me in this his mortal illness, and which he has charged me to make public when I feel my own death drawing near. I must, he says, confirm its truth upon oath, and leave it with a trusty person.

"My husband is dead, my father dying, my little one seems following them. What trusty person can be near me at the end? So I have a feeling that some day I shall destroy these papers with my own hand. But I have written

the whole truth, as my Father in Heaven is my witness, and this is my signature.

“MARGARET TERRIT.

“Signed this fifth day of December, one thousand eight hundred and sixty-four.”

CHAPTER VI.

If he has friends that love him,
'Twill set them weeping all.

The Nibelungen Lied

FOR a few minutes after Royden had finished reading, he sat like one in a dream ; then he slowly rose, and folding the two papers, placed them carefully in the breast-pocket of the coat which he had worn all night over his evening dress. Then buttoning it, to guard as safely as he could the precious documents, he went softly into the further room, and, looking down for the last time upon the dead face, gave one backward glance along the marred life whose secrets had now been disclosed to him.

A step in the outer room aroused him ; gently laying the sheet back over the worn, calm face, he went out to meet the woman who was now at liberty to take his place. A few minutes they talked there ; and Royden waited, as if his time were of little value. But when all had been said, and he had left the gloomy house, he glanced up at the dial on St. Paul's, and hailed a passing hansom, as if his life depended upon speed.

"To the Great Western station," he said, in his quick, clear tones. "A sovereign if you do it within fifteen minutes."

Out of the hubbub of the city, the man took the quiet, unfrequented streets ; the horse sped on with its inevitably unsteady perseverance, and Royden was in time for the 2.40 train to Langham Junction.

All through the journey, he sat quite still in his corner of the carriage, his thoughts intensely busy, while his heart was full of gratitude and rejoicing.

"To see her face when I show her these!" he murmured to himself; "to think of the truth lying here at last in my hand!"

So he was thinking—picturing the brightening of one pale face at the tidings which he bore—when the train stopped at Langham Junction, and he stepped hastily down upon the platform.

"Where for, sir?"

"On to Westleigh by the 6.30."

Just in his cool, natural tones, Royden answered the question; yet, as he did so, he glanced across to where the Westleigh trains were wont to start, with an intense anxiety.

"The Westleigh train left half an hour ago, sir!"

Half an hour ago!—and that was the last! No later train stopped at the little roadside station for which, at any time, so few passengers were booked, save those for Westleigh Towers. Royden Keith stood in hesitation just for two or three seconds. The road from this

station to Westleigh was a long twenty miles, and the station—built only for the junction of the lines—was so far from the town, that he would not be able to get a conveyance of any kind. True, it was possible to reach the Towers more readily by taking a bridle-path, which he had daringly taken once before, even though for several miles it ran between the sea and the cliffs, and was covered at high water. But then to walk this distance was impossible, with the tide upon the flow ; and he had no horse here.

Yet, how he had dreamed of Alice's glad reception of him, and her untold gratitude and joy at the tidings he bore, the tidings he had sought so long, and, having found at last, had hastened to bring to her himself! Must he give up even now, when he had come so far, and seemed so near her? No ; not even in such a case as this could Royden turn back from his earnest purpose.

"There is a farm," he said to himself, as he stood recalling an old house lying a mile or so

along the cliff way, "where I can get a horse. On the high road I may have to walk ten miles before I can obtain one. I will manage it, if it is within man's power."

It was within this man's power; and, an hour after the London train had passed on its way northward, Royden rode from the old farm where he had promptly bought a horse, which its master had never hoped to sell so profitably. The animal was young, and strong, and fresh from its stable; and Royden had mounted with a pleasant sense of its power and will to carry him fleetly along the dangerous shore.

The master of the farm, as well as his old father, urged Mr. Keith not to attempt the ride. The tide was treacherous, they said, and the distance across the bay much greater than it seemed. But Royden, shaking the men by the hand in his quiet, cordial way, told them he had no fear, only a great anxiety to get to Westleigh Towers that night, and much confidence in his new horse.

"I know the way well," he added, in his

pleasant, earnest voice, "and it is a grand June evening."

The two men stood watching him from the farm gate. He understood a good horse when he saw one, there was no doubt about that, and they had guessed at once that he must be Mr. Keith. He was just what they had fancied the Squire of Westleigh Towers.

"But," said the elder man, as they turned away after watching Royden out of sight, "it is a dangerous feat he tries to-night."

Royden knew this well. It was not in ignorance that he started on that ride. But the horse he had bought was fresh and fleet, and the flood-tide two hours distant yet. Sitting straight and firm in his saddle, his fingers tight upon the rein, Royden galloped along the narrow and uneven path, while the passengers he met looked after horse and rider wonderingly.

On and on, while the sun slowly neared the water. On and on, until it set, and Royden

breathed a sigh of relief, for the path had reached the shore at last. He paused one moment, and gave a look around him—first over the fading sea; then up the dark, precipitous cliffs; then higher still, beyond the fading sunset streaks. When that moment's pause was over, leaning forward in his saddle, he pressed his knees against his horse's flanks, and dashed along that treacherous road beside the sea.

Once or twice the young horse faltered in his pace; and once or twice he slipped, and would have fallen but for the strong, restraining hand upon the rein; but still he made his way bravely under the frowning rocks.

“On, good fellow, on!”

Now with caresses, now with strokes, did Royden urge him, while the tide rose and rose. That bay was reached at last of whose danger, at the flowing of the tide, he had told Lady Somerson and Honor, as they stood at that window looking down upon the spot. Ah, it

was so near home ! It almost felt like having reached home, to have reached this well-known spot, on which the windows of the Towers looked. But it was two miles across the bay, and the tide was rising, and a mist gliding northward from the sea, and slowly shrouding horse and rider in its chilling, darkening embrace.

But for an instant, just before it reached them, Royden strained his eyes to see the further limits of the bay, and—ah ! yes, the waters lay seething there, falling back a little, and glistening for a moment, then darkly lifting themselves in their power, and swaying broad and deep across the only way which lay before this solitary horseman.

Royden's hand fell gently on the horse's foaming neck, and for a moment his eyes fell too, resting from that gaze which had pierced the gathering darkness.

"There is no passage before us. If we can find no possible way inland, this hour means death for you and me—poor fellow !"

Urging him on, now by cheering words, and now by sharp, swift cuts, Royden rode to and fro within the arms of the bay, searching among the rocks for a possible way of egress; but the cliffs rose precipitous from the beach, and Royden saw that any hope of passing them was vain, while the sound of the waters, nearing the horse's hurrying feet, grew literally deafening in its horrible portent.

Brave and strenuous efforts did the young horse make, as Royden led him backwards and forwards in this vain and futile search; but the pace grew slower—into a walk at last; while the tide rose, and rose. So swiftly the waters rushed in at last, sweeping over that wide crescent, hidden in the mist, that in one second, as it seemed, horse and rider stood surrounded in the flood-tide.

Then the frightened animal started wildly on his own career, galloping backwards and forwards, to left and right, without aim or motive; racing to and fro in the very madness of his panic, as he tried to escape the grasp of the

hungry waters ; racing to and fro until at last, quite suddenly, he stopped in his wild gallop, stood trembling for a moment, with his eyes wild and strained, while the waves broke under his raised head, then, with a cry that was almost human in its anguish, he threw his head back, and Royden knew that he alone lived in that rush of rising waters, and that his only chance of safety was to cling to his dead companion.

At first the effort to keep his seat engrossed all his energies, but gradually that tension relaxed, while now he held one hand upon the breast of his coat, guarding that lately-won paper in its grip. Dreamily, with a consciousness of utter helplessness which was almost a relief after his restless, feverish exertion, he floated on the surface of the tide ; recalling brokenly, as one sometimes recalls a dream, how one man, years ago, carrying an infant in his arms, had been drowned within this bay ; languidly wondering over the exact spot, and

morbidly trying to imagine the scene. Then there came into his mind—still softly and vaguely—the story of a wreck upon this coast, and, looking out to sea, he tried to guess the spot where the ship had foundered, and wished that he could float far out to sea, and fall just there.

One minute he was piercing the misty darkness with his eyes, and calculating how long it might be possible for him to live, and in the next he bent his head against the beating spray, with a faint smile upon his lips, and dipping his hand into the water, laid it upon his burning brow and lips. But, through all, his fingers never once relaxed in their close clasp upon those papers he had borne so far in safety—so far!

Just before the dawn of the June morning a group of fishermen slowly passed along the silent, dewy park to the locked door of Westleigh Towers. They were men to whom this beautiful park had been lent as holiday ground; they were men who had learned to love

the master who had treated them as brothers, and not serfs; and so no cheek was dry when they trod noiselessly under the whispering leaves, bearing him among them, still with his fingers tightly closed upon the paper he had borne so far.

Gently and regretfully these men disturbed the sleeping household, and, with hands that were delicate then, if they had never been so before, they laid him in one of his own beautiful rooms. And when a girlish figure crept in and stood beside him, appealing mutely and tearfully for tidings, they whispered, in hushed and broken tones, that, sailing past the bay as the tide went down, they had found him there upon his dead horse, benumbed and motionless, as he must have floated for three hours at least.

Benumbed and motionless! These were the words the men chose, because they saw the fear and horror in the pale face they gazed upon. But Alice knew what they left unsaid,

and when she bent above the prostrate form, seeking in vain for some faint sign of life, a cry of terrible despair escaped her parted lips.

White and still the brave face lay ; nerveless and powerless was the strong, tall form ; yet still the wet stiff fingers of the right hand held their firm grip upon that packet, safely borne through all.

CHAPTER VII.

Nothing can sympathize with Foscari.

BYRON.

THREE weeks had passed since Royden Keith rose from that long and deathlike swoon, and, neglecting his sore need of rest, returned to London, only two days after he had been brought home unconscious. But the tasks which had taken him to town were all completed now, and he had come home to wait. For three weeks he had fought with his terrible suffering and weariness, when one day the slow afternoon train, passing through Westleigh, deposited, at that sleepy little station two passengers, who had a more engross-

ed and business-like air than the generality of people who halted at that rural spot. They gave their tickets to the solitary porter without a glance towards him, and they walked from the station together without a glance beyond the few yards of dusty lane which lay before them. One was a man of middle age, broadly built and well-dressed, but having the air of one who did not too fully comprehend the aim he had in view, or the way in which that aim should be pursued. The other was a small and wiry person, with ginger-coloured hair and complexion, and he decidedly *did* possess the air of knowing whither he was bound, and on what mission bent.

"Is it far along this baking lane?" inquired the elder man, without glancing into his companion's face.

"Only a brisk ten minutes' walk," rejoined Mr. Slimp, rubbing his short hands together, as if in the enjoyment of a private joke; "and if it took us ten hours, instead of minutes, the

fatigue would be repaid us with interest."

"If it is not," replied Lawrence Haughton, morosely, "our walk *back* cannot be too long, if that happens to be what you mean."

Bickerton Slimp smiled affably. Perhaps this was to be considered as a smart repartee of his employer's.

"This preliminary stroke will be over in a couple of hours now," he observed, adopting an impressive decision in his sharp, weak tones.

No reply from the lawyer, and the clerk continued, with a still more evident assumption of assurance,

"The fact is the man has not a leg to stand on."

"I don't know," put in Mr. Haughton, with gloomy stiffness; "I would not, even now, take too much for granted; and if this last move does not answer——"

"Not answer!" exclaimed Bickerton Slimp, coming to a dead halt in his walk, "how can it help answering? What can prevent its answer-

ing now? And the sum he will give us to keep silence will set us going again more prosperously than ever; after that, *I'll* engage that the firm shall become the richest and the sharpest in the county."

"If he does not offer us this bribe," said Lawrence, with no appearance of being carried away by Mr. Slimp's enthusiastic anticipations, "the practice—and something else with it too—cannot be saved, as you know."

"Of course I know," assented Bickerton, with a chuckle, "but there happens to be very little substance in that 'but.' You seem unusually and rather uncharacteristically timid to-day, sir; an unfortunate mood to have happened to fall into just now, when we want all our sharpest wits about us. Mr. Keith is no idiot, and even with truth and justice on our side, we must look sharp to intimidate him."

The two men walked on in silence now, and to judge by the expression of one, the truth and justice which had ranged themselves on his

side were not animating or encouraging companions.

"Here we are," cried Mr. Slimp at last, in an airy tone of stimulation; "this is our gate. Now, Mr. Haughton, don't you go and look down in the mouth, or our game will suffer, and our practice be nowhere. Depend upon me. I shall look you up, and when you are at a loss, you must just leave the little affair in my hands."

The insolent familiarity of the confidential clerk was by no means tasteful to the stern and concentrated nature of the master, yet some consciousness of the man's power over him kept all reproof from Lawrence Haughton's lips. So he walked up the park in silence, Mr. Slimp acting as guide, and showing a very suspicious knowledge of the place.

With an air of bustling complacency, he advanced to the great arched door of the Towers, and pulled the heavy iron bell which hung beside it, while Mr. Haughton followed,

not by any means so thoroughly at his ease.

"Mr. Keith," demanded Bickerton, impressively, and the door was opened wide upon the visitors; but the man who ushered them in wondered a good deal what acquaintances of the master's would come in this curt manner, without prefacing the name, or expressing the wish to see him; and he confided this wonder to Mr. Pierce, by whom he passed on the message.

So the valet appeared alone at the door of the room in which the lawyer and his clerk waited.

His master was not well, he said, and would rather not be disturbed, unless his presence was very particularly desired.

Lawrence Haughton, seeing that the man had taken this course upon himself, answered, with angry sternness, that his master's presence *was* very particularly desired, and that, as his own time was valuable, he should be glad to have his message delivered with promptness.

Pierce retired without further words, and

Lawrence Houghton looked curiously around the beautiful room.

"Yes," he thought, with a feeling of self-gratulation almost equal to that in which Mr. Slimp was at that moment indulging, "yes, he can afford to pay well."

When at last Mr. Keith entered the room, the self-gratulation even of Mr. Bickerton Slimp was turned for a minute into another channel. This man, who had horse-whipped him on one never-to-be-forgotten occasion, and who had often goaded him to the very verge of madness by his haughty, unassailable scorn and rather amused, but always evident, contempt, was ill, and had been ill. He came slowly and wearily into the room, and, leaning against the chimney-piece—not from habit, but in real need of the support—he turned to them a face which betrayed intense physical suffering.

There was much satisfaction to Mr. Slimp in that, for the consciousness had not yet forced itself upon him that the face betrayed just the

old courage, and the strength which was so firmly built upon great patience.

Lawrence Haughton made an effort to plunge at once into his errand, but the course was too thoroughly at variance with his professional habits to allow him to do so. In his own way, therefore, the words curt and strong, the manner stiff and elaborate, he apprised Royden Keith, there upon his own hearth, that he, Mr. Lawrence Haughton, solicitor of Kinbury, possessed of all needful information in the case, was then on his way to inform his Government that Gabriel Myddelton, the criminal condemned eleven years ago to the gallows for the murder of his uncle, Mr. Myddelton, of Abbotsmoor, had been tracked, through all disguises and false pretences, by himself and his confidential clerk, and was then in custody of the police at Westleigh Towers.

"Here! Have you the police here?" inquired Royden, looking round him.

"They will be here in two hours' time, or

less ; at any rate, they will be here before we shall choose to leave," said the lawyer ; adding, after a pause, as if the idea had just struck him,—“unless we are able to save you from this public degradation.”

He repeated the offer presently, more boldly and unmistakeably, tacking to it an impressive reiteration of the threat. His courage was evidently equal to the occasion, and Mr. Slimp (his mind at ease now on that score) felt that he might stand aside and enjoy the scene. He had no fear for the success of their plan, for was not Gabriel Myddelton standing there in the utter silence of dejection, consequent on defeat ? And was he not incapable of raising his eyes, either in surprise or contradiction ?

“Have you nothing to say ?” inquired Mr. Haughton, impatient now for his crowning success.

“Nothing,” rejoined Royden, still without looking up.

“You understand my present plans ?—at

once to make public your crime and duplicity, in a quarter from which there can be no appeal."

"I understand."

"And," continued Lawrence, his voice raised more and more eagerly, "to have you taken into custody at once."

"I shall not attempt to turn you from your plan. I told you once before, if you recollect, that I was willing you should pursue it to the end, if you thought it prudent on your own part."

"Then, in little more than an hour's time you will be in custody," cried Lawrence, unable to hide his gathering passion of disappointment; "and, by this time to-morrow, your identity with the condemned murderer (who was, only by a woman's craft, saved from hanging) will be a household word all over England—in every home in which, under the cunning mask of your wealth and your new name, you have obtained a footing. But," continued Lawrence, with the

crafty assumption of friendliness which sat so ill upon him, "I am willing to listen, if it strikes you that this fatal publicity could be in any way avoided——" He hesitated, trusting that the conclusion of the speech might be anticipated for him ; but he waited in vain. "If not," he exclaimed, savagely, "I shall let the law take its course. If not," he repeated, emphatically, as if to oblige a reply.

"Is it by your wish, Mr. Haughton," inquired Royden, with a brief glance towards the fidgety figure of Mr. Bickerton Slimp, "that your clerk is present at this interview?"

"I have assisted and advised Mr. Haughton throughout," struck in the embryo partner in the future firm, with a rather abortive attempt at easy self-possession, "and I wish to see him through it."

"You shall have that pleasure, then, with my hearty consent. I only desired Mr. Haughton to understand that it is not by my wish that you are made cognizant of the private affairs of

his own family. You have, as I am fully aware, been for a long time engaged, both for him and with him, in this search, and I am quite willing that you should be present at its conclusion; after that, I shall thank you to leave this house at once, and to bear in mind that, if you attempt a second ingress, I shall have you dismissed—by the shoulders.”

A pause then, and Lawrence, in a sudden access of impatience, reiterated his old threat, again insinuating the one chance, from his own generosity and compassion, which remained for his victim.

Royden broke the ominous pause which followed, speaking in quiet, weary scorn:

“You intend, you say, to make public your conviction that you have discovered Gabriel Myddelton, the murderer of the Squire of Abbotsmoor? Let me save you from the unpleasant ridicule which you would incur by so doing. I have read the document which proves that young Gabriel Myddelton was innocent of

the crime for which, eleven years ago, he was tried and condemned."

"The—the—devil!" panted Lawrence Haughton, in uncurbed passion. "What do you mean?"

"I have seen and read," repeated Royden, calmly, "the confession of the real murderer—one Benjamin Territ, miner, of Abbotsmoor—confirmed by affidavit, that the document is true upon oath."


"Where is the forgery?" cried Lawrence, his face convulsed with wrath. "Where is this perjured scoundrel, and his lying document?"

"The document," returned Royden, too weary or too ill to be roused to either passion or amusement, "with a complete history of the case—*verbatim et literatim*—drawn up by a famous solicitor, has been placed in the hands of the Government, together with a petition to the Home Secretary." Royden paused here, though only because his breath was short and hurried; but in that pause Lawrence Haughton

felt the ground give way under his one spot of safety. "Before this time," continued Royden, glancing from the lawyer to his clerk, "the Home Secretary has communicated with the judge—I felt that to be necessary, because judgment had been formally recorded against Gabriel Myddelton on evidence and the decision of a jury; which judgment is now, of course, respited—I hope you follow me—and Gabriel Myddelton's innocence is established, legally and technically."

"These papers," shouted Lawrence, his passion entirely overmastering him, "are foul and lying forgeries!"

"On the contrary," put in Royden, his quiet tones broken a little by evident suffering, "these papers, which prove the innocence of Gabriel Myddelton, have been endorsed by the Home Secretary, and now lie at the Home Office, at your call, Mr. Haughton, or at the call of anyone who desires to witness the issue of this long-contested matter."



A pause again, while Mr. Haughton and his clerk struggled with many varied and uncomfortable emotions, among which was pre-eminent a very natural wish that they were at that moment beyond the park gates of Westleigh Towers.

"I will look into this," cried the lawyer, presently; "I will soon lay bare this vile fraud."

"Thus, as I said," continued Royden, as if he had heard no interruption, "Gabriel Myddelton's innocence is legally established with his Government. As for his friends—if he has any—they must maintain what opinions they choose. But you understand that the papers are at their call, too. I have given you all particulars I choose to give. Now complete your long-cherished plan, if you think it well, Mr. Haughton."

"I am not easily hoodwinked," remarked Lawrence, suppressing his passion by an immense effort, as he moved towards the door; "and I will disclose this knavery."

Royden's eyes, with something of their old quizzical glance, were fixed upon the uncomfortable figure of the little clerk, and he did not seem to even hear Mr. Haughton's threat.

When his guests had left, he rose slowly from his leaning posture, a smile crossing his lips as he pictured the very comical position in which Mr. Haughton would have been placed if there had chanced to be a grain of truth in his assertion that the police would follow him.

In the meantime, without uttering one word to each other, the baffled lawyer and his clerk returned to Kinbury; after which Mr. Slimp was despatched to the Home Office, and Mr. Haughton went through his books for the twentieth time, reading on every page the one word—*ruin*.

Striving against his growing weariness, yet as composedly as if he had been alone all the afternoon, Royden went out to meet the carriage when he heard the sound of wheels. With a smile of greeting, he helped the two ladies to

alight, and the younger one stood at his side until they were alone.

"Oh, Roy," she whispered then, "you are not getting better, you are weaker and weaker every day, and I can see how dreadfully you suffer. It is all because you fought so hard against this illness just at first, when you felt you had so much to do; and this was as much for my sake as——"

He stopped her with a touch of his fingers upon her lips, and a pleasant smile of dissent, but by no words; and she went slowly up the stairs and told her sorrow, as she always did, to the old lady who awaited her.

"He is so kind," she sighed, losing suddenly the look of pleasure which had brightened her pale face a few minutes ago, and which would brighten it again when her thoughts should go back to her one engrossing memory of those papers now lying in a place of safety which she only vaguely knew as a depository for those precious deeds, "so thoughtful for every one,

so full of helpful, generous projects ; and yet there is this strange solitariness about him ever—a solitariness which it seems as if no one could ever pierce.”

“Wait, Alice—wait and see, my dear.”

For this doubting thought, though a sad one, was a familiar one with the elder lady, and one which she could only bear to muse upon in silence.

What was the one thing which he lacked in his noble, useful life ? Could no one ever make *his* lot as bright as he ever strove to make the lot of others ?

“But while I wait,” sobbed Alice, “he is ill ; and it may come too late.”

CHAPTER VIII.

I know not how it is,
 But a foreboding presses on my heart
 At times, until I sicken. I have heard,
 And from men learned, that before the touch
 (The common, coarser touch) of good or ill,
 That oftentimes a subtler sense informs
 Some spirits of the approach of "things to be."

• PROCTOR.


THREE weeks had passed since Sir Philip Somerson had brought Honor the tidings that Royden Keith had gone home to Westleigh Towers on the day after her ball, and was confined there by ill health. Sir Philip and Lady Somerson were now abroad, and Honor had heard nothing more. The time was drawing near for the closing of the mansion in Kensing-

ton, and the adjournment of its young mistress to Abbotsmoor. But who could foresee what lay between that day and this July afternoon, when Honor Craven, as she sat reading to Marie, was astonished by receiving the card of Mr. Bickerton Slimp, on which was penned a request to see her on most important private business.

She acceded to this request without hesitation, for, thoroughly as she disliked him, she could not forget that he belonged indirectly to her old home and her old life.

When she entered the library, where Mr. Slimp awaited her, she found him very much changed from the sleek and fawning little sycophant he had always shown himself to her. He stood humble and isolated in the centre of the room, his clothes worn and dusty, the one word "failure" stamped legibly upon his person and manner.

Honor sat down, and waited for him to speak. It was not long before he did so,



though he was long in finishing what he had to say. Without any introduction, though with tiresome circumlocution, he informed Miss Craven that he had felt it his painful duty to come and lay before her a few particulars respecting the affairs of Mr. Haughton, as she was unfortunately one among many whom he had defrauded ; and his (Mr. Slimp's) conscience would not allow him to rest until he had striven to make up, in some measure, for faults in which he (as Mr. Haughton's clerk) had been indirectly—though most innocently—concerned.

It would appear that Mr. Slimp's conscience rather eagerly sought rest ; for, without a pause, he diverged from every point obtainable from this centre, and rang a hundred changes on the frauds his late employer had practised, not only upon her and upon the public, but (in a still greater and more inexcusable degree) upon his ex-clerk himself—guileless and unsuspecting.

Honor listened in silence—it was hardly worth while to interrupt him—and he went

glibly on ; making himself plainly understood, though, in his splenetic excitement, he made use of one or two expressions which were as Greek to Honor.

Above all facts, this one was urged and resented most. Mr. Haughton had made a promise to his head-clerk that at this present date he would take him into partnership, and now he had backed out of the agreement ; and the mortified ex-clerk, having discovered that the practise of Haughton, Solicitor, could not stand, had determined to take a special revenge for the two-fold duplicity.

Mr. Haughton was now hiding from his creditors, and Mr. Slimp happened to know his present concealment, and was willing to betray it to Miss Craven—for a consideration. It was then, and not till then, that Honor allowed him to see a little of the scorn his words and conduct had merited ; but Bickerton was far too deeply bent upon his own aim, to let this interrupt his flow of pleasant confidence.

"Even if you decline to remunerate me for this useful information, Miss Craven," he said, insinuatingly, "I shall still tell you. He has done worse than that to spite me, and my turn has come now. He has done worse than this to hundreds of people. If it had been only me he had injured I would have been silent, but it is hundreds more, and so my duty is to bring him to justice."

"I do not wish to hear any of this," said Honor, indifferently, as it seemed, "it has no effect upon me at all."


But still she sat quietly to listen, and Bickerton Slimp could not read the agonising effort it cost her to hear, and—above all—to discredit what he said of her old guardian.

"Even if I did not betray his hiding-place," resumed Mr. Haughton's would-be partner, "it would soon be discovered, and he'd be hunted out. He isn't used to making himself scarce at a moment's notice, and taking different characters on different emergencies, as some are.

There'll be plenty after him, too—mad as blood-hounds when they know what he's done. No, there's no doubt about his soon being taken, but I thought it right to warn you first, Miss Craven, because if you wish your old guardian let off, it will be easy work for you; and at the same time, if you think justice ought to be dealt him, you have only to say the word and make it worth my while. I always was willing to do anything for you——”

He pulled himself up in hot and sudden haste, for one glance from Honor had been more than sufficient to remind him on what dangerous ground he trod.

“No; there's no doubt that he will soon be taken, Miss Craven, by one or other of the victims of his fraudulent schemes,” he resumed, more placidly, “and they are many. I could not enumerate, if I tried, the deceits which he has practised. Many families, whose names even you could remember, Miss Craven, are involved in ruin by him, though they do not




know it yet. He has embezzled money he had to invest, and taken people in by sham mortgages. He has again and again suppressed certain deeds, and effected the sale of property previously mortgaged. More than one poor dupe has let him have every pound she possessed, to invest or place on mortgage, and the deeds have represented nothing but forgeries. One poor widow thinks she has bought, through him, the house she lives in, while it really belongs to a wealthy builder in Kinbury, for Mr. Haughton suppressed one set of deeds and supplied another. He has over-drawn his banking account, and borrowed money which is due. No, there can be no help for him, although his credit in Kinbury and the neighbourhood is so good that the crash may not occur just yet; *may* not, I say, unless I take the matter in my own hands. My first move is to inform you, Miss Craven, that he is hiding now at the 'Anchorite,' in Thames Street, and if you have

any wish yourself to be the one to bring him to justice——”

Honor rose, her cheeks and lips white with anger.

“ You forget to whom you are speaking,” she said, her tones as quiet as usual, though her manner was unmistakeable.

Mr. Slimp made an effort to regain the ground he had lost by this one too daring step. Cunningly, long ago, he had discovered both the one passion of his master's life, and the indifference with which it had been treated by his ward; and, judging by his own contemptible feelings, he had imagined that Honor might rejoice over an opportunity of repaying her old guardian for the persecution she had suffered at his hands. But this feeling could only last one minute, and he knew that it had been injurious to his cause. Still he could regain his ground, he fancied; and it was an unctuous satisfaction to him to lengthen his confidence against his erstwhile master. There was, too, the novelty



of truth in so many of these cheering disclosures of fraud and duplicity. But he hurried now over the information, as if he feared its being still more summarily cut short. He might well fear. Honor had heard the one thing she wished to hear, and now no heed was paid to any further word.

“That inn in Thames Street is a capital place to get abroad from, under foggy circumstances,” Mr. Slimp resumed, with spirit; “and we can manage, if you really wish me to undertake it.”

“I will think of what you tell me,” said Honor, quite coldly, though she was actually trembling in her fear of this man in his treachery; “I will see you again.”

The fear, so proudly battled with, took the form in Mr. Slimp's eyes of a new courage, and he gazed in servile admiration on the girl's beautiful, easy figure, now that she seemed to understand him at last.

“In the meantime pray fix upon your own

price"—the word was uttered in the very refinement of scorn, and Honor's eyes swept over the narrow form of the little traitor before her—"for secrecy, and I will purchase it from you—if your terms suit me."

"To you, Miss Craven, a thousand pounds is scarcely worth speaking of; therefore you would not, I hope, think a thousand pounds——"

"To effect my purpose," said Honor, quietly, while she raised her clear eyes fully to his crafty face, "one thousand pounds would be too little. Make your own terms, and I will see you here, at this hour to-morrow."

An expression of immense self-satisfaction settled in Mr. Slimp's face. He could afford now to be confidential even on an almost extraneous subject.


"If poor Mr. Haughton's last move had not so signally failed him, Miss Craven," he began, in a tone for which she could have annihilated him where he stood, "the old and well-established name and business would have been saved,

and his present difficulties never made public; but that last move *did* fail, and he himself had no power of getting out of his present scrape. He felt so very certain of the identity of Mr. Keith, of Westleigh Towers, with the man who murdered Squire Myddelton, of Abbotsmoor, eleven years ago, that, even with only the very slight and presumptive evidence which he was able to amass during almost two years of search and inquiry, he went in person to inform Mr. Keith that the whole proof was in his own hands, and that he would at once give him over to the law as the condemned and escaped criminal, Gabriel Myddelton, unless he chose to buy his immunity—you understand, Miss Craven? That move, as I said, most signally failed; for—a humiliating fact which we first learned in this interview—the innocence of Gabriel Myddelton is now legally established; and I myself saw the documents proving it. I came up to town on purpose, and read them all at the Home Office.

"His innocence!"

Honor had no idea that the two words had passed her lips, and after their utterance her silence was intense.

"And more than that," resumed Bickerton Slimp, with an air of jaunty encouragement, "I do not, and never did, believe in the identity of Gabriel Myddelton with Mr. Keith of Westleigh—who, by the way, seems dying rapidly. Of course I have helped—for my own purposes—in fastening the suspicion upon him, but I never saw our way clearly to a grain of tangible proof; and I always felt that if he had been the man whom, for eleven years, Lawyer Haughton has been trying to hunt down, he could never have had such doubts about him, or shown such hesitation and uncertainty in the case. *He* is not one to be delayed by scruples, and I always understood his one reason for not capturing his man, and the solution of those days and weeks and months of doubt which he underwent. If he'd had cause to feel sure in his own mind, the



capture would have been sharp work. As for me, I doubted all along if this could be Gabriel Myddelton, and now I'll take my oath it is not."

The words all entered Honor's ears with a clear and almost appalling distinctness, and her heart was wildly beating; yet she stood there utterly unmoved, until he departed with an impressive reiteration of his intention to be at her service next day at that hour.

But the silence and the stillness left her when he left her. She moved softly and restlessly about the great silent room, repeating to herself those words which seemed to mean so much.

"Not guilty! Gabriel's innocence! Not Gabriel—not Gabriel! Dying! And Gabriel innocent!"

Gradually her brain grew confused, and she lost the sense of these reiterated words, while only that lately-formed resolution of hers held away. She must see Lawrence; she must see

her old guardian to-night, for fear it might be too late.

Then there came over the girl a feeling of loneliness and dread most unusual to her. She listened and longed for the sound of Phoebe's return, while still she tried, with all her strength, to throw off this new and miserable foreboding, which had fallen upon her with such a terrible weight, and under which she could not even hope.

What was it? What had brought this crushing weight upon her? Was it fear for Lawrence, or—for whom? Had it fallen upon her when she heard of her guardian's crimes, or of Gabriel's innocence, or of that interview which one of Gabriel's cousins had had with the man on whom he laid so foul a charge?

She battled with the feeling, striving to dissect it, that, if possible, the action might dispel it.

"It could not be," she whispered to herself, "that a felon's fate should be my guardian's now;

as it was—— It could not be," she moaned, strangling each thought as it forced its way to her lips, "that there should be a fatal ending to this illness of one who has been wrongly judged. It cannot be! Oh! if Phoebe would but come, and speak to me of other things."

The house seemed so large and silent, and she so solitary, that when at last Captain Trent came into the library unannounced, she greeted him with an unfeigned gladness which filled his heart with an exquisite delight as unexpected as it was delusive.

"Honor," he cried, his joy overmastering him, "are you really glad to see me—are you really?"

"So glad," she answered, speaking low in the gravity of her own engrossed thoughts. "Phoebe is away."

The last few words could not damp him, for her greeting had given him just the slight encouragement which was all he needed; and once more—more urgently than ever, but for

the last time now—he poured out the old story of what he called his unconquerable and unchangeable love. He never guessed what pain he gave her, and she did not blame him by one thought; because she saw that, as deeply as it was possible for him to feel, he felt this.

Softly and kindly she answered him as she had answered him often, but she saw how much more earnest he was now than he had ever been before, and she saw that only one thing which she could say could prevent this old scene being repeated. It would be well for Hervey. Once let him feel that this love of his was hopeless, and he would quietly submit, and live his new life still more earnestly; once feel that he must take this first love from his heart, and he would seek another love to take its place. No fear that Hervey's heart would break in solitary suffering.

And for herself? Well, it would be best for Hervey, and she could trust him now. She laid her right hand gently upon his, and looked



up into his face with a glance so earnest and so true—so sorry for him and so sorry for herself—that he felt instinctively that whatever words she uttered would be uttered solemnly from her heart, and must be sacred between them for evermore.

“Hervey, I will tell you the truth to-night, while we are here alone together, and then I know you will never speak to me again as you have just done. It will save us both pain afterwards, for you will see how impossible it would be for me ever to give you a different answer from that which I have just given. I have no power to give my love to you, or to anyone now, Hervey, for it was given long ago. We are cousins and old friends, are we not? And when I tell you this, I trust you with all my heart.”

The great astonishment which filled his mind was plainly written in his face. Could this be possible? Honor, who had never seemed to care for anyone in particular, for whose love so

many strove, and to win whom no trouble could be too great, no wooing too persistent! Honor to have given her love away long ago! Why, long ago must be in those old times in Statton, which, in Hervey's mind, had long been entirely disconnected with Honor's present life. How could it be, and to whom?

A sudden fear for her—which a minute ago would have appeared impossible, and a minute hence was to again appear impossible—made him look down questioningly and almost pittingly into her face. Ah, no, Honor could never have given her love unsought and unreturned. In all his sadness and despondency, he could almost have smiled at himself for the fear.

"Do not ask me," she said, reading the question in his eyes. "It is an old ache. Do not make me speak of it now, Hervey. You will forgive me any pain that I have caused you, because I bear a sorer still."

"Honor," he whispered, all the earnestness and manliness of his nature rising up to meet

this trust of hers, "thank you for telling me this. As you knew it would, it has killed all hope within me; but perhaps it is better so."

"Yes," she answered, with another gentle touch upon his hand, as she dismissed the subject, "it is better so."

For a few minutes they stood in silence there—in the silence which only trusted friends can fall into—and then Phoebe returned from her drive, bright and excited. Yet though the three chatted pleasantly, and even jestingly, together, Phoebe—little astute as she was—could detect an undertone of sadness in Honor's voice, and could read the new look of quiet hopelessness on Hervey's face.

"Oh, Honor!" she cried, repeating various items of news she had heard from the friends with whom she had been driving, "Mr. Keith is dreadfully ill at Westleigh; and, of course, the girls say it is a punishment to him for having turned hermit suddenly in the middle of the

season, and buried himself alive in his castle on the coast."

Phœbe's light voice ceased suddenly, and she left the room as soon as she could, murmuring unintelligible reasons for her absence.

Hervey had, quite by chance, been gazing at Honor while these words were uttered; and somehow—though he never afterwards could make it quite clear to himself how it had been—he read, in that moment, the one part of the secret which Honor had not told; and it made him very silent, until a question from Honor roused him.

"Hervey," she said wistfully, "may I ask you to do something for me?"

"Anything—a hundred things!" he answered eagerly, while still the heaviness was in his tone.

"I want," she said, raising her clear, grave eyes to his, and speaking very seriously, "to see my own cousin—Gabriel Myddelton."

"Gabriel Myddelton!"

Captain Trent could only echo the name in his surprise.

"Yes, Hervey; he is innocent, and has been wronged, and I long to tell him how sorry I am if I ever, even for a moment, felt he *might* be guilty."

"But, Honor, you do not know where he is."

"No," she answered, with deep thought; "but still I want this message borne for me. Will you undertake it, Hervey? I can trust you best."

"Dear Honor, of course I will; any where, to any one; only tell me where, and to whom."

"To Mr. Keith, at Westleigh Towers."

"But, Honor——"

She stayed his words of quick surprise.

"You wonder," she said, quietly, "why I should send this message to him, and why wish you to deliver it yourself. Will you wait for your answer, Hervey? Or am I asking too much?"

"Too much!" he cried. "Why, I would take it to the world's end for you, Honor!"

"Thank you, then that is all. Just say to Mr. Keith that I have a great longing to see my cousin—my own cousin—Gabriel Myddelton, and that I pray him to help me to do so. That," she repeated, slowly and thoughtfully, "is all."

He asked her no further question, and, when they separated, he whispered, with an earnestness which was totally unselfish:

"I shall start early to-morrow, Honor, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart for trusting me."

Honor had no need to invent an excuse for avoiding her engagements that night. Who, looking into her white face, could fail to see the pain she suffered? Still she pleaded so anxiously for Phoebe to go, that Miss Owen consented, though with great unwillingness at first, and drove away in her radiance, leaving Honor standing at the hall window

in the twilight, smiling a bright good-bye.

Half an hour after Phœbe had arrived at her destination, the large closed carriage stood again before the door at Kensington, this time waiting for the young mistress. She did not take her seat, as Phœbe had done, surrounded by a fairy pile of gossamer fabric; but she came from the house in a quiet morning dress, and taking her seat wearily upon the wide silk cushions, she gave the order, "The Anchorite, Thames Street," just as she would have given it to Buckingham Palace.

She had no room in her mind to-night for any thought of what her grave and powdered servants might surmise. Lawrence was not suspected yet, and she must see him before it was too late. That was all she allowed herself to think.

Yet this haunting dread, this subtle foreboding, which she had fought against so hard, held her still in its firm grip. And she gazed from the carriage window with a pitiful yearn-

ing for some sight or touch which should dispel this feeling, for she knew it to be the presage of some evil or some agony to come.

CHAPTER IX.

A more glorious victory cannot be gained over another man than this, that, when the injury began on his part, the kindness should begin on ours.

TILLOTSON.

HONOR'S carriage was being driven slowly up and down before the inn to which Mr. Slimp had unintentionally directed her, and she herself was making futile inquiries of an obsequious waiter, when Lawrence Haughton entered the house. He came in just as he used to enter his office, moodily and silently, but still with his head erect and his step heavily arrogant. There was no shabbiness in his attire,


no slouching in his gait, no cringing in his bearing, as there had been in his ex-clerk's; but still, when Honor had followed him upstairs, and, after a quiet tap upon the door of his private sitting-room, had opened it before he had time to stay the entrance of any one, she could plainly see—ay, though the light was drearily dim—that he had a manner strangely at variance with his old, self-contained assurance.

If she had not been so wrapped up in her own earnest purpose, Honor would have been literally frightened by the effect her sudden appearance had upon him. The swarthy colour left his face, and beads of perspiration stood thickly on his brow.

“Honor!” he stammered, his voice hard and husky, “Honor—you?”

“Yes, Lawrence.”

“You!” he repeated, as if the shock had deprived him of the power of further utterance, while his eyes claved to her face in al-



most terrible nervousness. "Here—alone?"

"Yes," she said again. "I, Lawrence, and alone, of course, because I came on purpose to see you."

He drew towards him one of the unlighted candles which stood upon the table, and taking a box of wax-lights from his pocket, struck one after another, all equally clumsily.

"No, please," said Honor, staying his hand with gentleness. "Don't you think there is light enough, Lawrence?"

He dropped the last match, and pushed the candlestick from him; then he moved slowly, until he stood with his back against the window, his eyes still riveted upon Honor, who faced the fading light, beautiful in her gravity and earnestness.

"Why did you come?" he faltered at last. "Is there not humiliation enough in store for me? Of all the world, why did *you* come?"

"I have come," she answered, quietly, "to ask my old guardian to let me help him now."

He was fighting hard, as she could see, with the feelings which mastered him ; the consciousness of his plans being baffled, his love lost, his ambition wrecked ; and in her pity she strove to forget everything save her old regard for him, and her best memory of his care and guardianship. Looking almost as she used to look in those old days, and speaking to him almost as if he were her guardian still, she told him—without reverting to any particular crisis in his affairs—what she wished to do for him.

Kindly and anxiously she spoke, and as he listened, the faint wild hope of her affection which had existed in his mind even to this hour, died a sudden and a hopeless death. In her pure warm pity, and in memory of those old times when his home had been hers, she wished to rescue him from poverty, and to clear his name from dishonour. But there could never be a resurrection-day even for the *friendship* of those 'old times.

"You know it all, then, Honor ?" he asked,



his lips stiff and dry. "Of course Slimp went to you at once with his own story."

"He came to me this afternoon; I hope it was at once, as you say, because it will not be well to lose time, Lawrence."

"Time—I have no time left me," he muttered, doggedly; "Slimp will have bruited my affairs all over Kinbury before this time to-morrow."

"He is to do nothing until this time to-morrow," Honor said; "then he will come to know my decision."

"On——? Your decision on——?" questioned Lawrence, hurriedly. "Has he been offering *you* the task of——?"

"Never mind what he offered," put in the girl, quietly; "his offers, as well as his motives, are too despicable to occupy us for a moment. In his selfish haste he has done what both you and I may some day thank him for doing. When he comes to me to-morrow, Lawrence, I hope that you yourself will see him. It will be

kind of you to spare me another interview with him, and, besides that, he will understand better from you how unnecessary his interference will be."

"The little dastardly thief," muttered Mr. Haughton, between his teeth; "it is he who has been the one to tempt me, and to lower me to this pass."

"A poor tempter," said Honor, in quiet scorn.

"Ay, poor enough; but it is impossible to do business for years with a wily, double-natured sneak and not find his guidance grow easy, whether one stands up against it at first or not; especially," he added, with a flash of honesty, "if one's own disposition is to grind and save and—speculate."

"It must have been that," interposed Honor, with a glance of puzzled anxiety; "for you were never extravagant or reckless in your expenditure."

"No, I have no pleasure in spending on

myself—or on anyone else,” he answered, bitterly. “You know—for you often said it in old times, Honor—that I saved my money just like old Myddelton. That it was which brought on the passion of speculation ; and see how it has ended. I am a ruined man, and my only chance of even personal safety is cut off now by a traitor who has been my abettor and encourager all along ; and who turned my ruling passion—avarice—to all his own base ends.”

“Why talk of him ?” asked Honor, gravely. “Think of what you yourself wish to undo, Lawrence.”

“It is too late,” he said, and put one hand before his eyes.

“No, not too late, Lawrence, nor is there any risk for your personal safety, as you say. You will be able to leave England when you choose, and with your name unsullied. Tell me if I have done what is right. It was so hard for me to know, because you—and then Mr. Stafford—have managed these things for me,

and left me ignorant. Give me your advice now, Lawrence. Will you have this uncrossed check upon my banker here, and take the money yourself to Kinbury to-morrow, or will you have this crossed cheque, and pay it in to your account at Kinbury? Only tell me which, and the sum is left for you to add."

"I—I cannot," faltered Lawrence, brokenly.

"Yes, you can," she answered, with her pretty smile; "you will not let a silly pride come between you and your old ward. We have no need of a lawyer's help, have we?"

"No need," he whispered, in the anguish of many mixed feelings; "but I cannot take it. Oh! Honor, you do not know the half of my deception."

"I think I do," she answered, thoughtfully; "I think that Mr. Slimp would rather tell me more than less."

"I must tell you, and tell you all," he persisted.

"Very well, Lawrence, but not until to-mor-

row; when you come to-morrow you shall tell me all. Then justice will have been done to those who have been wronged, or are poor."

"Honor," he cried, moving in sudden haste from the position he had so closely maintained, "how can I bear this—to rob you even more than I have done? I cannot. I will go away. I will go to-night, as I always meant to do. If they capture me—if, led on by my own clerk, they bring me back to face the law—it will be simple justice after all; while this—no, I cannot do you such a wrong."

"The wrong has been done to others, Lawrence," said Honor, sadly; "what I ask is, that you will repair it as far as you are able."

"As I am able!" echoed Lawrence, bitterly. "No; it is you who would save me from disgrace and publicity, and I cannot take more from you, Honor. I will leave England to-night."

"Not to-night," she said, with gentle kindness, as she put the cheque into his hand; "I

shall not persuade you against going, Lawrence, because you may think it best, but you will not go under fear of pursuit, leaving those wrongs undressed, and bearing the terrible consciousness of having injured those who trusted you."


"But it is done."

"Yes, it is done," she answered, sadly; "but we can make amends. All must have what is due to them; and, Lawrence—my dear old guardian—you can go then with a name which is not hated and dishonoured."

He stood unmoved while she laid the paper in his hand, but she knew that this was the chill of agony, not indifference."

"If," she said, with a great effort to speak cheerfully at last, "if Lawyer Haughton chooses to wind up his affairs and go abroad, what wonder need it cause? Such things are almost of common occurrence now."

"I can—I can sell my practice then," said Lawrence, with a sudden break in his misery.



"If I wait in England to undo this evil, then the practice will be worth what it was before, and I shall not be utterly penniless."

"That will be pleasant," she answered, with a smile. "You will come to-morrow, Lawrence, and tell me all is safe and well. Now I must go."

"But," he said, with a change from his short-lived excitement, "you could not do this, Honor, if you knew what had been my last effort at degradation—you who always thought so kindly of Gabriel Myddelton, and, through all, believed him innocent."

"I do know," she said quietly, when he paused.

"Sлимп told you that too, did he?" Lawrence Haughton cried. "And did he tell how I, like others, had been a blind fool all along, and that Gabriel Myddelton was innocent?"

"Yes, he told me that; and he told me"—the struggle it cost her to say these words as she had said the others, was most pitiful—

"that you were mistaken when you thought that Gabriel Myddelton had come home as Royden Keith."


No answer, and she made the words a question, raising her eyes longingly to his.

"Was that true, Lawrence?"

"I suppose so; but Heaven only knows," he answered, pettishly. "It has been a studied belief of mine for two years. How can I root it out so suddenly?"

"But if he had been our cousin Gabriel, would you not immediately have recognised him?"

"It is more than twelve years since I saw Gabriel Myddelton," Lawrence answered, moodily, and unconsciously betraying his own doubts. "But, remember, Honor," he added, hurriedly, "that if he does prove to be Gabriel, and is innocent, or even if Gabriel Myddelton eventually turns up, you have nothing to fear. Old Myddelton's money was willed to you, and no man on earth, even being a Myddelton, can



claim it from you. Remember that, Honor, my——”

But a sense of the fitness of things was able just then to restrain even Lawrence Haughton. He could not see her face plainly now, for the twilight had deepened to the first darkness of the summer night, and the window was narrow and its panes not over clear, but he spoke with a change of tone.

“Honor, forgive me ; and you will remember what I say, if I am not here. There is no flaw in Lady Lawrence’s will, and old Myddelton left her the power of bequeathing his wealth, without any restrictions.”

“Yes,” she said, absently, as she offered him her hand, “I remember.”

He held it tightly in his own while the old passion, rising with a greater strength than ever, wrote its lines upon his hard, stern face ; and while he crushed back with a violent effort the pitiable confession which rushed with almost conquering force to his lips.

"I shall see you to-morrow," he whispered, "for the last time; and it might have been that——" Then he broke utterly down, and it was some minutes before he regained the mastery over himself.

Not another word could he utter as he took Honor down and put her into her carriage, not even in answer to her kind good-bye; and when she had driven out of sight, he was still standing there upon the pavement where she had left him, lost in a deep, regretful dream.

In spite of that cheery look and smile, Honor's heart was very heavy as she drove home; and through all this doubt would force itself—Was she fulfilling well the trust which her great wealth had brought her? Only her own heart could answer the question which it asked, but she knew that no such hesitation could have stayed her in this visit to her old guardian.

It was quite early in the afternoon of the next day that he came to Kensington; and, in spite of the weight of shame which bowed him down,



when he begged her to let him tell her of his delinquencies and debts, she saw a marked change in him, which reminded her of one or two far back days in her old home, when Jane and Phoebe had been away, and he had tried to make his favourite happy without vexing her by any sign or uttered word of love.

She interrupted him continually when he enlarged, with a morbid self-torture, on the failure of so many of his speculations, which, as she had rightly guessed, had been maliciously exaggerated by Mr. Slimp; and they spent a not unpleasant time together before the time for the clerk's visit.

"You will come upstairs, Lawrence, when he is gone, won't you?" Honor said, when she rose to leave the room at Mr. Slimp's hour. "I shall wait for you. Phoebe is shopping. I shall be quite alone."

She sat and waited for him, without offering to take either book or work into her hands, her thoughts too deeply engrossed by her old guar-

dian's possible future, and too intensely anxious over it. But she had not long to wait, and she turned with a smile when he entered.

"So soon Lawrence! I am glad."

"Yes, he had no wish and no need to stay," said Mr. Haughton, coming forward with a curious and uncharacteristic air of diffidence. "He tried two or three different experiments; he tried insinuations and threats and promises; but from the first he saw his own mistake. Honor, you bade me help him for you, if he were poor, but he is not poor. He has carefully guarded his own interests always; and, though he is baffled and mortified, it is, after all, his own doing, and he has not left himself in any awkward circumstances—trust him for that."

"Then we may dismiss every thought and memory of him," said Honor, with a sigh of relief. "And now, Lawrence, tell me more of your own plans."

They sat together for a quiet hour, talking of these plans and hopes. It was an hour which



even Honor remembered for years, while for him it was to be of life-long memory, shining like a star in his gloomy past, and ever leading his thoughts to those better things of which she spoke.

His eyes and lips had lost their hardness, when at last he rose to say good-bye. Honor had heard Phoebe Owen's return, and, with her hand upon the door, she stayed him.

"You will like to bid good-bye to Phoebe, Lawrence?"

"No," he cried, hurriedly, "no; let yours be my last. What is Phoebe's compared with——"

"Stay one minute, Lawrence," she interrupted, grieved to see this momentary return to his old manner. "I will send Phoebe, and yet I will have the last hand-shake. Phoebe was once your ward, as I was. We have only an equal claim upon you; and this, you say, is to be a long good-bye."

And, before he could answer, she was gone.

"Phoebe," said Honor, watching her cousin's face rather curiously as she gave her message, "will you go and see Lawrence? He is going abroad, and is come to bid us good-bye. I shall come in to you presently. And suppose I order tea? Lawrence will not stay and dine with us, but still he may afford to idle away five minutes over a cup of tea."

"Is Lawrence really going abroad?"

The question came from Phoebe's lips, freighted only with surprise. Honor saw this with a feeling of deep thankfulness. The time was come for which she used to long, and Phoebe's inexplicable infatuation was over.

"Why is it?" inquired Miss Owen, standing placidly for her maid to arrange her tunic after the inevitable crushing of the drive. "Why does he go so suddenly?"

"You forget that we cannot expect now to be aware of his plans until they are made public. If he had been intending and preparing



for this for months, we should not have known it."

"No, I suppose not," rejoined Phœbe, with the ghost of a sigh; "I'm ready. You won't be long, Honor?"

Honor smiled at the request. It was so unlike the old times, when, to gain a few minutes of her guardian's sole attention, Phœbe would have exercised herself in any harmless stratagem. She waited only a few minutes, timing her entrance just as the footmen carried in the trays; and Lawrence did stay, and Honor's purpose was successful, for the parting was an easy, natural parting, and Mr. Haughton's feeling was that he had left the house of true friends, who had genially and pleasantly entertained him; not that he had departed in bitter humiliation, with coals of fire heaped upon his head. This was Honor's intention, and she had, as usual, brightly worked its fulfilment.

"Honor, how can it be?" cried Phœbe, when

the two girls were left together again. "To think that I have parted from Lawrence, and yet am not broken-hearted! I can hardly believe it—can you?—remembering how different things used to be? I wish he would have told me what first induced him to form this plan."

It was because Honor had feared such questions for him that she had not left him long with Phoebe; but it would seem that Miss Owen had made time for several.

"Jane will be pretty lonely at The Larches," she continued, "but she will keep the house on, Lawrence says. Why, Jane never had above a hundred a year of her own, had she, Honor? Do you think she can manage to live at The Larches on that? Lawrence says Slimp is in London now, and likely to stay here. I wonder whether his leaving the office had anything to do with Lawrence's decision; because I always thought Slimp would stay in Kinbury all his life—didn't you?"

So the girl ran on, but Honor managed to



evade her answers ; while every minute now, as night drew on, her own anxiety grew greater and greater for tidings from Hervey, or tidings which Hervey might possibly bring.

CHAPTER X.

It's hame, hame, hame, to my ain countree.

ALLAN CUNNINGHAM.

CAPTAIN TRENT journeyed to Westleigh by the first train from London, yet it was past mid-day when he pulled the great iron bell beside the arched door of The Towers. From the moment this door was thrown open to him, a certain hush upon the house made the contrast wonderfully strong between this day and that merry one he had spent here before, when old Mrs. Payte arrived so suddenly with Honor, and the house had been filled with gaiety and laughter.

Yes, Mr. Keith was at home, the grave old



butler told him, and led him to a long, high room on the right of the hall—a room in which the solitary figure of an old lady, sewing beside the window, looked almost like a doll's.

“Mr. Keith,” she repeated, dubiously, as she came forward to receive Hervey's bow and inquiry, “he—yes, I have no doubt he will see you; but he is far from well. You will excuse the liberty I take, as an old woman, Captain Trent,” glancing at his card, “if I ask you not to let me summon Mr. Keith if—if it is unnecessary, or——”

Hervey read the real anxiety in the pleasant face—to read such thoughts as these was not impossible to him now—but he could not guess how rarely had visitors lately brought any pleasure to Royden.

“Indeed,” he said, in what Phoebe called ‘his nice way,’ “I would not ask to see Mr. Keith at all if I felt that I were bringing him worry or anxiety. Let me assure you that it is quite the reverse.”

Miss Henderson smiled; partly in relief, and partly in acknowledgment of the courtesy of Hervey's manner.

"I will take your card," she said, and left him alone in the long room.

Only a few minutes passed before Royden entered; and at that moment Captain Trent experienced the greatest shock he had felt through all his life, though he little guessed how long the effect of this sudden shock was to hover about him, and have its share in deepening the growing seriousness of his own thoughts and feelings.

"My God, Keith!" he faltered, incapable of hiding his pained astonishment, "have you been so ill?"

"I have not been ill," said Royden, quietly, as he took Hervey's outstretched hand; "I mean, not worse than I am now. If an illness is my doom, it is in the future, not the past."

"Sit down," said Hervey, losing every trace



of his old affectation, as he drew forward a large arm-chair, and, taking a seat himself to insure Royden's taking his, tried to remove his frightened gaze from his companion's face—so worn and pallid, and yet bearing still, even in its weakness, that wonderful strength of patience and steadfastness which, far more than any difference in features and form, made the contrast between these two men so striking.

“How are all my old friends, Captain Trent?” inquired Royden, seeing much of the change in Hervey—for his glance, though weary and feverish, had its old keen power—and wondering a little over it.

“All well,” said Hervey, trying to talk easily. “I have come as messenger from one of them.”

“Are Mrs. and Miss Trent in London still?”

The question was cool and easy, and the listener could not detect its motive.

“Yes,” rejoined Hervey, with unconcealed indifference, “indeed they are.”

"And your other cousins?"

"Phoebe," replied Hervey, feeling his way gradually to the message, "could not be better, I fancy; she enjoys three days for every one she lives this season."

"That is pleasant for her."

"But Honor," resumed Captain Trent, not succeeding in his effort to be quite at ease, "does not seem well, or happy."

No answer, and Royden's eyes were fixed upon the sunny grass beyond the open window. But even Hervey could see that some thought had deeply shadowed them.

"And she bade me," continued Hervey, his voice taking an earnestness which the memory of her words had brought, "see you, Mr. Keith, and tell you this message; I must say it in her own words, it will be easiest and best. She said, 'Will you tell him that I have a great longing to see my own cousin, Gabriel Myddelton, and I beg him to help me, if he can.' That was her message, Keith, just as she

entrusted it to me. What answer may I take her?"

"You shall take her Gabriel's own answer, if you will," he said, speaking sadly, after a slight pause. "He will be grateful for this message from the only one of all his house who has ever spoken kindly of him, or doubted his guilt. He will be very glad of it, especially if you deliver it yourself, as you have done to me."

"But how would that be possible?"

"Would you go to him, if it were possible?"

"Yes—certainly. I would fulfil Honor's wish to the letter."

"Then, if you will stay with me to-night, I will give you an address in Liverpool where, to-morrow, you will find Gabriel Myddelton; where now his wife is waiting to receive him."

"His—wife?"

"His wife," repeated Royden, quietly. "For some time she has been staying here with an

old friend of hers, the lady whom you met just now; but yesterday she went to Liverpool to await the vessel in which her husband sailed from America. His life is safe on English ground now, and he is glad to come."

"How did he know?" faltered Captain Trent.

"I telegraphed to him the very hour his innocence was proved. I hoped to go and greet him when he landed, but I could not."

Hervey sat in silence, his thoughts growing tangled.

"This is all so strange," he said, when at last one of those thoughts found words. "Can Gabriel Myddelton really be landing in England to-day?"

"Really!"

"And married!"

"And married, Captain Trent. Even with that brand upon his name, he found one who would link her life with his, and who—but that her health failed, and he entreated her to save

it for his sake—would never have parted from him.”

“And she has been here?”

“Yes, visiting me for some time; we are very old friends; and Miss Henderson and she are very old friends, too. I should have gone with her, as I said, if I had been better; I hoped Miss Henderson would go instead, but she would not consent to leave me. So Alice Myddelton went with Mr. Romer—you have not forgotten what a good fellow your old Rector was, Captain Trent?”

“Indeed I have not, though he was never very fond of me.”

They talked a little longer, but never alluded again to those old days in Statton; and presently dinner was announced. Royden took his place at table, but Hervey noticed that he touched nothing on his plate, and though he talked a little, Hervey could see that his strength was soon exhausted, and that Miss Henderson grew painfully anxious.

With an unusual thoughtfulness, Captain Trent strolled out alone after dinner, and, when he came in, he devoted himself to the old lady, and left Royden to what rest he could obtain.

Captain Trent was ready next morning for the earliest train to Liverpool—industriously and anxiously was he fulfilling this trust confided to him—but early as it was, Royden came down into the hall as the horses drew up at the door.

“You will find no difficulty, I think,” he said, with a grasp of his hot fingers. “I am very glad you are going, and your cousin will be glad too.”

“Honor, you mean?”

“No; I mean Gabriel.”

“Have you any message for Honor?” inquired Hervey, hoping that he should not need to tell her how Mr. Keith was looking.

“No,” he answered, without a change of tone, for he had schooled himself for this. “Her wish will be fulfilled. She will see her cousin, Gabriel Myddelton.”

From the carriage, Hervey looked back upon the two standing in old-fashioned hospitality to see him off.

"He looks—dying," mused Captain Trent to himself, with an uncomfortable shudder, "and the old lady seems to know it too. She is not very wise, though, to show so plainly that she knows it. Even the servants seem under a cloud. I verily believe he has made them fond of him, in an old-fashioned sort of style. They do not look like domestic machines. How courageously he defied his illness last night, when he went out to speak to those fishermen, and how he entered into all they had to say, standing there with his dogs about him. I believe even the dogs are fretting to see him changed."


Hervey Trent did not arrive in Liverpool until a whole day after the landing of the passengers from the Cunard steamer, and he had little difficulty in finding Gabriel Myddelton at the hotel to which Royden had directed him. The moment he met his cousin face to face, he

knew him. It was the face from the picture at Abbotsmoor; it was the face, though so much changed, of the boy-cousin Hervey could remember playing with, and always envying as heir of Abbotsmoor, and of old Myddelton's money.

Involuntarily he held out his hand, and welcomed Gabriel in tones that were unusually warm and genial for Captain Hervey Trent. Of course Gabriel did not recognise him at first, and, when he did, his welcome seemed much colder than Hervey's; but this was only due to the reserve which had grown upon him during his twelve years' banishment.

Beside his manner, that of Alice seemed almost cordial. Perhaps much of her timidity had left her, now that she felt her husband near her once again, and in safety; but, perhaps it was the contrast to Gabriel's dreamy reticence.

Hervey had just repeated again, word for word, the message with which he had been charged, and Gabriel had answered, with a gratitude which was almost touching, that he



would go in person to thank Honor, after he had seen Royden, when a telegram was brought into the room.

It was addressed to Alice, but her fingers trembled so sadly, while she held it, that Gabriel gently took it and opened it for her; Hervey, waiting beside them, felt his heart sink with fear. The telegram was from Miss Henderson at Westleigh Towers, and these were the words it bore :—

“ At Mr. Keith's request I send this to stop your return here. For you in your delicate health, and for Mr. Myddelton, after his voyage, it would be highly unwise to come. Ask Mr. Myddelton to let us know where you stay, and I will write. Mr. Keith even wished me to leave him too. It is aggravated typhoid fever, Dr. Franklin fears, but he has telegraphed for further advice. We can easily guess by what it has been brought on, and indeed by what accelerated since. Of course I shall not leave. I will write, but do not be alarmed if

you do not hear very soon. Every minute of my day is too little to give him."

"Oh, Gabriel!" cried his wife, clasping her hands about his arm when the telegram fell from his fingers. "What shall we do? Oh, poor, poor Roy!"

"There is but one thing for me to do," said Gabriel, with intense sorrow in his face and voice; "but, dear wife, where can I leave you?"


"How—do you mean——?"

"That I must go to him; but I am such a stranger now in my native land, that I cannot choose for you, except that—as he says—you must *not* go to Westleigh."

Then Hervey came to the rescue.

"If Mrs. Myddeton will let me escort her to London," he said, earnestly, "I am sure I could not take back to Honor any better acknowledgment of her message."

"Do you think so?" inquired Gabriel, eagerly. "You know her best, do you really think so?"



"I am sure, very sure," replied Hervey, promptly; "here is Mr. Romer, ask him, for he knows Honor too."

It was readily settled, and Mr. Romer (who had invented business in Liverpool most of that day, thinking his company unneeded) seconded the idea so warmly, and made the arrangements with such promptness, that the plan was carried out almost as soon as proposed. Mr. Romer himself returned, by his own particular wish, to Westleigh Towers; and though Gabriel fancied he went as guide to him, the real reason was the Rector's earnest desire to be with Royden now.

They travelled only half way by rail, and then finding no fast train would take them on, and no train at all would stop at Westleigh that night, they posted; and having four strong horses they could see the castellated towers of Royden's home rise before them in the melancholy light of the July midnight.

Just at that hour, Gabriel's wife sat with

Honor Craven in the luxurious little dressing-room which (as well as the chamber beyond, with its girlish trifles lying about, and its soft pink hangings) had been hastily prepared for Alice, and tried to tell her the story of her life.

"I can tell it to you." she had sobbed in her fatigue and helplessness, when she had read the lovely earnest face of this new cousin, who met her so kindly, and made her so wonderfully at home, "I wonder why."

"Because," said Honor, with her bright sweet smile, "I am the nearest relation your husband has; and should like to be a near friend of yours."

There was a wonderful contrast between the two girls, as they sat together before the pleasant little fire which Honor had ordered because the midnight air was chill, and Alice (partly in fear, and partly in weakness) had been shivering down stairs. Not in the features alone was this contrast evident, but, more strongly still, in the natures which looked from their

eyes. The strength and steadfastness of the one, the perfect oblivion of self and wide thought for others, and the gentle helpfulness, no less than the rich and radiant beauty, made more evident the nervous timidity, the shy, mistrusting reticence, and the shrinking from responsibility, no less than the fair fragile prettiness of the other.

“I have not much to tell, but I wish I could tell it better. What he has done for Gabriel I dare not speak of; Gabriel must tell it for himself. His has been a long, long course of kindness, which he has practised just naturally, as he does all good things. Oh! if I could only tell you of these kindnesses, for me and for Gabriel—if I only could—but I cannot. Miss Craven, what have I said to bring the tears to your eyes? It was in Germany, nearly twelve years ago—you have heard of the old gentleman who left his name and property to Mr. Keith? It was just before that time that I met him first, since (seven years before) we had

been children together, and near neighbours in an English county. He was a barrister, though he was not practising just then, and his name was Royden Sydney. We went to America after that, on the same vessel—he, and my father and I. He was a very rich man then, and going to the New World for pleasure. On that voyage——”

“Do not tell me to-night,” put in Honor, with a gentle caress, as she saw the tears gather in Alice’s eyes.

“Yes, I would rather tell, please. On that voyage my father died quite suddenly, and I was left entirely alone in the world, for I had no other relation—I had even no friend. What a friend *he* was upon that voyage, and afterwards, I never could tell you. His care and friendship did not cease when we had landed, and it was only through his help (exerted in so many ways) that I obtained a livelihood, for my father’s income died with him, and I was almost penniless. One day—I remember it as if it

might have been to-day—there appeared at the house of the gentleman whose wife had, at Mr. Keith's request, taken me to be her companion, a young man who, not having found the master at the office, had come on to the house, and been admitted amongst us all. That very evening Mr. Keith (he was an honoured guest there) had returned from Peru, and he happened to be with us when this young man entered. I saw him watching the scene keenly, and I felt that what he saw of the new-comer he liked or recognised. The merchant would not engage a clerk who came with no testimonials and no recommendations, unless he could give security for two hundred pounds. I saw the quiet, steady look deepening in Mr. Keith's eyes—it was so sad to me to watch the anxious face of the young man who, though evidently an English gentleman, pleaded so urgently for this situation, that I watched Mr. Keith instead—then presently he said he would pay the security down, and Mr. Hollys, the Boston merchant,

could repay it to his clerk when he dismissed him. From that time Gabriel and I——”

“I understand,” said Honor, softly, when she paused.

“And we married soon,” resumed Alice, wiping away her tears hurriedly; “and we loved each other dearly, and were very happy, though our lives have known many sorrows, and our hearts have often failed and fretted. But the greater part have all been lightened for us by that one kind hand, and our sorrow often turned to joy by him. Oh! how I wish that I could tell you how.

“At last,” she went on presently, folding her weak hands in her lap, “my health failed, and Gabriel’s heart seemed breaking, because they told him that, to save my life, I must be sent home to England, and he knew he dared not come. He had told me all the story of old Mr. Myddelton’s murder, and of the trial, every word, before he won my promise to marry him; and so, of course, I knew why we could not go,

for neither he nor I had any English friends ; but again our one true friend came to the rescue, and he brought me to his own beautiful home. That was two years ago, and I have been getting better and stronger ever since. Now that Gabriel has come, I know that I shall soon be quite strong again. I found, one day, in that foreign land, an old friend of my mother's, who, through loss of her property invested in mines, was living a struggling life out there ; and—quite unthinkingly—I told Gabriel, in Mr. Keith's presence, of how I had traced her. Royden remembered this—as he remembers all opportunities for kindness—and, when the question arose about my going to England, and he said he was returning, and gave me that offer of a home, he begged that she should come too ; and—you know the rest. Our home at Westleigh—Miss Henderson's and mine—has been a peaceful and a happy one. No word or glance has ever told that it was not ours equally with his ; and for those two years he has tried, ah ! so earnestly

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and patiently, to clear Gabriel's name, that my husband might come and live again in his native country. Gabriel had told him the whole story when he so generously offered me this home in England, for we thought it might make him retract the offer. Yet how could we ever think that of him? It only made him determine—for he never doubted Gabriel's version of the story, never—to trace out the real murderer, if it were in man's power to do so. You know that he has succeeded, as *no* other man could; for, but for his pity and his help, Margaret Territ would have burnt that confession. Oh! how full my heart is when I speak of him, and what can I ever do in return? What can I ever do, but what the very smallest child he helps may do as well—just pray my God to bless him.”

Honor's head was bowed upon her hands, and it was not until Phoebe tapped gently at the door to hasten her, that she raised her face again; then Alice saw the marks of tears,

and wished she had not told any sad tales to-night.

On the next day but one, came the anxiously expected letters, one from Miss Henderson, and one from Gabriel, both short and very sad.

Miss Henderson told of the fluctuating nature of Royden's fever, of the skill of the four physicians, of the calmness of the Sister engaged as nurse, and of the unfeigned sorrow of the servants; finishing with the hope that Alice herself was better, the letter being evidently a composition studied, from beginning to end, to keep up her spirits.

But Gabriel's was different. He told of the violence of the fever, the awful suffering, and the intermittent attacks of delirium; of the total absence of all rest or ease; the discouraging opinions of the physicians; the dulness of the nurse, and the awkwardness of which he himself was painfully conscious in his own attendance beside the sick-bed.

Alice read this letter aloud, as she had read the other; but suddenly, as she reached the end of the sad recital, she made an abrupt pause.

"I—I—think I will not read the rest," she said, in her nervous, frightened way; "it may grieve you, Honor."

Honor gazed at her in mute surprise.

"Grieve me," she echoed, sadly. "Could anything grieve me more deeply than those words which you have just read?"

"This is about yourself—that is why I stopped," explained Alice, characteristically.

"Will you—read it, please?"

"You are sure you wish it?"

"Quite—quite sure."

Alice took up the letter again and read; and when she had finished Honor answered, "Thank you," very softly, while Alice wondered over the nature she could not understand; for these were the words she had read—

"Chiefly, in all his delirium, he calls one name—*Honor*. Can it be my cousin he longs to see?"

You had better not tell her, perhaps, as it is very sad to hear it; and I would rather not know that she has given him such a deep unhappiness as I feel him to be suffering, when I listen to the tone in which he calls her, or speaks to her. It makes this bitter watching more bitter even than it need be; and oh, Alice, I feel now for him—as I used to feel for myself—how impossible it is to minister to a mind diseased. ‘Do not tell her,’ I said—and yet I leave it to you. You will know best.”

A few minutes afterwards, Honor went alone into the library, where Hervey waited to hear the tidings from Westleigh. He started when she came in, for she might have passed through a long illness since he had seen her last night. But she did not wait for him to question her.

“Hervey,” she said, “I—do not look at me so; I am well—I only want to speak to you, Hervey. Phoebe will tell you of Gabriel’s letter; I will send her to you. I am going on a jour-

ney, and I want to know if you will come with me. You took the same journey for me once before—*for* me then, not *with* me. Cousin Hervey, will you come with me now to Westleigh Towers? Can you come at once—now please, Hervey, or we may be—too late.”

“Honor, dear Honor, I am ready.”

CHAPTER XI.

My shadow falls upon my grave,
So near the brink I stand.

Hood.

WHILE Phoebe was still telling Captain Trent of Gabriel's letter, Honor re-entered the room, her hat tilted low over her tell-tale eyes.

"Take care of Gabriel's wife," she whispered, her pulses quickening as the carriage rolled past the window near which they stood, and the restive horses were pulled up before the door.

"I wish I had ascertained about the trains," fretted Hervey, as he followed the girls into the hall. "If there are none now beyond Langham, I don't know what we shall do."

"I have sent a groom on horseback," said Honor, quietly, "and he is to telegraph on for post-horses. Good-bye, dear little Frau."

Yet for all her quietness, Hervey felt her hand tremble on his arm when he led her out to the carriage, and through the whole journey, though she sat so still and patiently, the restlessness and the anxiety within her eyes were pitiful to see. And beyond this, there was another misery which Hervey little guessed of. The consciousness of what might have been, if she had doubted then, as she doubted now, those words which Theodora Trent had represented as Royden's. *Doubted!* Ah! no, she had never *doubted*, even then.

"I—I must have hated myself," she thought, "if I could have believed *him* to have said them—even then. But he took me by surprise. She had only just told me, and—not as if the words were—a falsehood."

By Honor's wish, the chaise was stopped at the park gates of Westleigh Towers, and she

and Hervey descended. A little crowd had collected at the door of the lodge; women who had run from their cottages to hear the latest tidings; fishermen who had walked straight up from the beach to hear of the master before they entered their own homes; men and women who had walked from the mills to-day round the highroad, on purpose to hear what might be learnt from the physicians, as they drove through these western gates back to the station; a homely throng, which drew back when the foaming post-horses stopped at the gate, and—in spite of the anxiety upon their faces—never obtruded an inquisitive word or glance. Honor's sad eyes rested on them for a minute, then she moved on with a hurried start, for she dared not trust herself to hear the words which they might say.

"Hervey," she said, glancing up at the castellated towers as they neared the house, "how silent it is!"

"Oh! that's nothing," asserted Hervey,

promptly. "Of course there's no band playing, and that sort of thing. My dear Honor, what sound would you have?"

"It was so different when I was here before."

"Of course, because the house was full of guests."

"But even the dogs are gone!"

"Yes, strange to say," returned Hervey, making an effort to speak with a great deal of ease and unconcern, "they persist in standing or lying about the hall in a manner ridiculously abject. As if *they* need conspire to make things more dismal than they are! It is a mistake to cultivate dogs."

Royden's grave old butler showed no surprise when he admitted the beautiful young lady, for whose coming no preparation had been made, but he was conscious of a great astonishment filling his mind when he noticed how softly and quietly she entered the sick-house, and how, as she followed him across the hall, she stopped to speak by name to one of

Royden's dogs, and to lay her hand caressingly upon his drooping head. "She, too," thought the old man, with a glance into her anxious face, "is distressed about the master." He was standing then beside the door to which he had led her, but just at that moment Mr. Keith's valet happened to cross the hall, and Honor, who knew him well, paused, her eyes full of mute and anxious questioning. But Pierce, with only a silent bow, passed on. How could he stop there in the full light—he, a man of middle age—with his eyes full of tears?

"Hervey," whispered Honor, when the cousins were left alone in the long drawing-room, "I saw a Sister of Mercy on the stairs, and she—she had *no* hope in her face."

"They never have," asserted Hervey, glibly, "never, my dear. They wouldn't be proper Sisters if they had."

Miss Henderson answered immediately the note from Alice Myddelton, which was given her with Honor's card, and she came in to greet

Miss Craven with the most strong-minded determination to give cheerful impressions generally, and to report, with particular cheerfulness, of Royden. But Miss Henderson was not by any means a strong-minded person, her heart being some hundreds of years from its fossil condition; and so it happened that the moment she met Honor's eyes she broke down ignominiously, and cried like a child. And Honor, holding both her hands, and kissing her now and then in her gentle, pitiful way, cried with her, while Hervey kept his face turned to the window.

But Miss Henderson had not come then from the sick-room, and she herself was waiting anxiously for tidings.

"The physicians are in consultation," she said, "and only the nurse in attendance—of course with Mr. Myddelton. Pierce sent to London for Sir Edward Graham yesterday, and he is here to-day too, and brought another physician with him. Pierce says Mr. Keith

knew Sir Edward very well, and often visited him in London. Dr. Franklin, of Westleigh, has been here ever since the first alarm. But they all say the same thing," sobbed Miss Henderson, again forgetting her determination, "that there is imminent danger in these restless attacks of fever alternating with such death-like exhaustion. I, through all those three or four weeks before the fever asserted itself, was haunted by a fear of what was coming. He said it was weariness—headache; he said sometimes that it was *nothing*. But I knew he could not look *so* unless—something else was near."

It was just at this moment that the room door was opened, and Honor, turning her eyes to see, started to her feet with a cry which sounded almost glad.

"Gabriel!"

He, too, had recognised her in that moment, and the cousins met with both hands extended, while for that moment there was a smile on each of their faces.

"Honor," said Gabriel, very quietly, "of course I knew you, Honor."

She told him how she had longed to see him, and how glad she was that he had come home, though——

"Yes," he said, finishing the sentence for her sadly. "Though it was so good to come home, *this* has turned the pleasure into pain."

Then he tried to change his tone again, and tell her he had recognised her in a moment from what Royden had written of her, and how he thanked her for her trust in his innocence, of which Royden had told him too. But her thoughts would scarcely follow these words, and he knew it.

"I am to await the physicians here," he said, only glancing at his wife's letter, when Hervey gave it to him, but putting it carefully into his pocket-book.

"She is well," said Honor, gently, "only so very anxious."

"She knows," he said, "that we are only watching here to see him—die!"

"God is so good!" breathed Honor, softly.

"Mr. Myddelton," put in Miss Henderson, with a little sternness in her tone, "you always fear the worst—the very worst."

"How can I help fearing," questioned Gabriel, betraying the timidity which had been so fatal to him years ago, "when I think what he has been to me and to my wife, and how powerless I am now to help or give him ease?"

"Is he always unconscious?" asked Hervey.

"Always; as far as we can judge. He sometimes seems to wake to a little quickened intelligence, but it is only to fall back into the old vague or fevered wandering. Miss Henderson is right, I do fear the very worst. All my old nervousness and mistrust come back to me in the presence of this anguish. Yet I had fancied that these long twelve years, and his help, and his example, had made me stronger

and more trustful. Honor, has Alice told you what he has been to us?"

"To her," said Honor, every word an effort to her. "She said you would tell me more—some day."

"Let me tell you now, while we can do nothing but wait here. There may come a time when I dare not speak of it; when it will break my heart to recall, in words, his prompt, unquestioning trust in my innocence of that crime which banished me; his patient efforts to clear my name, and make it possible for me to come home; his manlike forbearance when suspicion rested basely even on himself; his true, earnest help, through these twelve years; and, above all, that simple, generous kindliness of his, which was the cause, at last—as nothing else on earth could have been—of my innocence being proved. Honor, I can only tell you now the story of our first meeting, but even that will tell you much I dare not speak of. You have heard of my escape from prison, and the rumour

(which was true) that I sailed from England to America in an emigrant vessel. My steerage passage was taken for me by the man whom Territ employed to see me on board, and then I had just five shillings in my pocket, which I slipped into his hand in gratitude when we parted. Neither my watch nor my ring could I venture to sell, because the Myddelton crest upon them might have led to my capture. I had left them in Margaret Territ's care on the night I had changed my coat at her cottage, but she had given them back to me on my escape from the jail. She had offered me money—all she had—but that of course I would not touch. Even in America, and even to keep myself from destitution, I felt I never should dare to part with my watch and ring, such a terror of detection was upon me ever.

“That was a miserable voyage, even beyond the misery of dwelling on the injustice which had forced me to this flight. Of course I naturally shrank from all companionship with those


about me, but I knew I should equally have done so if they had been of my own grade. What fellowship had I now with any man on earth? The poor wretches around me, huddling together in poverty and uncleanness, had more companionship with one another than I had with anyone under that wide stretch of sky, which was all I cared to look upon; for could I regret the shore I left behind, or build one hope upon the shore I was to reach? I know now how different it *might* have been, even in that voyage; but it was, as I have said, a time of acute and morbid suffering to me.

“One gentleman among the cabin passengers, often spoke to me when I was on deck, often spoke, indeed, to many of us. Of all the state passengers, he was the only one who could spare one of those idle hours on board for such as I, or who had a cheery word to give us in our seeming roughness, or hopelessness, or squalor. As good to me were these hours he gave me as was the first glimpse of the old country's

shores a week ago—better, because sometimes, in the quiet starlight, or the sunset time, he would talk of another shore which was more surely *home*.

“When we landed at Levi Point, and I stood alone on shore among the luggage—scarcely one article of which belonged to myself—hopeless and spiritless, and weighed down with that sense of utter loneliness which I knew must be my doom for ever, this gentleman came up to me. His first-class ticket was for Boston, he said, and as he was not going so far, he would like me to take it, because he knew the third-class emigrant trains were often a week upon the road. For one minute I morbidly resented his cognizance of my poverty, but in the next I humbly and gratefully accepted his gift, knowing I could not have provided myself even with dry bread through that week of travelling.

“When we stopped at Richmond, he sought me out again, and—in spite of my workman’s



dress and sullen humour—took me to dine, and talked with me as with an equal (yet as no one had ever talked to me before) while we walked back to the station at nightfall. The third-class train was just coming in when we reached the station, and I remember well how, for a few minutes, he stood back, and, rather sadly and intently, watched the passengers as they crowded out upon the platform. Then he left me, and moving quietly and easily among these poor tired creatures, he seemed to give help or encouragement to all, as—God bless him!—I believe it is *natural* to him to do. Honor, I remember once, when he had managed to get tea for a forlorn little crowd (men who, like myself, had not a penny in their pockets, and women and children who had not tasted food for four-and-twenty hours, because—like myself, too—they had not thought to store for after-use any of their last meals on board), I saw them actually crying over him, and touching him with a reverence which, in that time and place, was

terribly pathetic. Could I be ashamed if I, too, were as foolish ?

“He left the cars at the last station before Boston, and when he took my hand and bade me God speed, I could not answer him a single word, because I felt that our paths in life could never cross again. But I was to meet him once more in a week's time. Can I ever forget that first week in Boston ? Each day was worse to me, I think, than those I had passed in the condemned cell, under sentence of death. Every hour of daylight I spent in my pursuit of work, toiling along every street of the great city, and calling in at every office and every store. I had no need of guide or directory, for I would call *everywhere* ; I would not miss a single door until I either found employment, or fell by the way.

“Those were days of literal starvation, Honor ; and when the darkness stopped me in my search, I could only creep into a police-cell, and, with a tin of water for my supper, lay my-

self down upon a board and try to sleep so ; while other men lay near me, poor and homeless as myself.

“ Sometimes, with a faint chance of success, I was sent from one store to another at a distance, but always—after the vain effort—I came back to the same spot, and went on from door to door, never missing one, and often tempted, instead of my vain request for work, to cry for a mouthful of food. And often I was hurried back into the street with suspicion, because so hungrily I had been watching the dollars changing hands in the stores.

“ Sometimes I met with men as weak and poor and hopeless as myself, who had come from the old country with a store of energy and money too, but had sunk until they were what I saw them, deep in poverty and gloom. And sometimes I saw men rich and prosperous, and was told that they had worked their own way up, without the aid of capital or friends.

“ Sometimes I met with one of those who

had sailed with me, and he would tell me, perhaps, of his bitter home-sickness, wondering that I did not own to that; wondering, above all, why I should hurry past the post-office, where my own countrymen, in crowds, waited eagerly for news of home. It is a sad tale to tell you, Honor, at this sad time, but it will soon be over now.

“A week of this ceaseless work went past, and I was gaunt and hollow-cheeked; ill with almost constant ague, and having the appearance, as I knew quite well, of being only half-witted, in my nervous attempts to conceal the fact that I was almost barefoot. At last, one day, came a change of thought and plan which saved me.

“I was standing just within the door of a Printer's office, waiting for an opportunity of asking whether they would engage me on what terms they chose, and leaning against the packets of paper, ill, footsore, and famished, when a sound, which had seemed to me the surging of

waters about my head, grew first into raised; distinct tones, then into phrases which I could follow.

“Two men were comparing their early struggles for a livelihood, and recalling how one turning-point had brought them each success at last. In my weakness, and with that surging pain in my head, I could not follow the words quite distinctly; yet this one thing I understood—my only chance of obtaining employment was to seek it as a *gentleman* (what a mockery it was to recall my old life now!), and as if employment were of little value to me.

“I knew what the men meant, and I crept from the store, and tried to rouse my failing energies to think out this thought, and face my possibility of success. I *was* successful, Honor; not because these men were right in their random assertion, and not because I acted my new part well, but because on that day Heaven was so merciful as to guide me to the one who had helped and befriended me before.

“It was my last desperate chance, and of course I was willing to stake upon it the little I possessed. I even dared the possibility of being traced, for—if it failed—what was my freedom worth ?

“In return for my watch and ring, I obtained a suit of clothes in which I might begin my new search *as a gentleman*. It never entered my head to doubt its being worth what I paid for it, and I was truly grateful to the man who equipped me. When he asked me to accept a shilling for my dinner, and following me to the door, said kindly that he should be very glad to hear of my luck, I felt—in my new-born hope—that I could hardly thank him enough.

“If Alice told you of our first meeting, Honor, you know the rest of my story. From the office of a rich stock-broker, to whom that very day I applied for an engagement, I was sent on to his private residence. It was the house in which Alice lived as governess, and Royden

Keith was visiting there that very day. The master of the house heard all I had to say, but told me decisively then that he could engage no man for a post of trust without securities. He told me afterwards that he said it chiefly to get rid of me, thinking me sickly, and unpleasantly persistent. Somehow just then Mr. Keith seemed to take the arrangement of the matter quietly into his own hands, and I was engaged. Ah! what a night of gratitude and hope that was, and with what joy I walked two miles next morning at daybreak, to tell the tailor of my success.

“When I had been in that office only one year, Honor, I had won my employer's confidence, and the money was repaid to Royden Keith which he had advanced for me. Two years afterwards, Alice and I were married, and for a wedding gift my employer gave me the share in his business which it had been my ambition some day to buy. Soon afterwards he died, and when news came to me,

three weeks ago, that I might come home, I was able to sell the business to my junior partner, and bring home an income sufficient for our wants.

“Honor, you see that it is not only my liberty I owe to Royden Keith, but all that I possess, and—even my life, I think.”

Honor's eyes were covered with her hand; Hervey had walked away again to the window, and there was utter silence in the room when Gabriel's voice ceased. But suddenly Honor rose, her whole form trembling, for her listening ears had caught the physicians' steps.

They all three came quietly into the room, two gentlemen with white hair and grave, thoughtful faces, and one with young but care-worn features, and an unconquerable nervousness, which yet betrayed no want of skill or decision. This was Dr. Franklin of Westleigh, and in a moment he recognised Honor, whom he had often met at Statton Rectory. When he had spoken to her, and was about to return to

the sick-room with Gabriel, one of the elder physicians came forward, making his shrewd guess with promptness.

"Miss Honor Craven," he said, as if he felt that in such a scene as this there was no need of form, "I could hardly be a London man and not know you by sight and name. Will you pardon my bluntness if I ask you one question?"

She offered him her hand with a faint little smile, and while he spoke he kept it in his own.

"Our patient, in his delirium, calls one name persistently, not consciously, nor with any knowledge that he calls it, but still at any moment it might be that he knew her. It is Honor. Is she here?"

"Yes."

The girl's answer was a very whisper, but the old physician heard it.

"I see. And are you prepared to witness his acute and restless suffering? Should you be afraid to see the frequent changes of strife and

exhaustion? Think well before you speak, for your presence must either do great good or serious harm."

"You will be unwise to permit it, Sir Edward," put in the other London physician, "It is not a post for her. It is not a sight for one who has never seen life hanging by a thread."

"I have great confidence," rejoined Sir Edward, with a sign for his silence, "in a naturally fine and unimpaired constitution. If he can only have a little sleep——"

"If I may go," said Honor, raising her eyes to Sir Edward, who read their bravery and patience through their yearning, "I will do exactly what you bid me. I can be very still and silent, and I am very wakeful. I am used to sickness; I am used, even, to—death. Please to feel how steady my hand is."

It was not Hervey only who turned away his eyes, as if the pathos of her low words hurt him.

"Can you rest first?" Sir Edward asked, presently. "It would fit you a little better for your watch."

"The only rest that I can know," she said, "will be to watch him."

"That is well," put in the strange physician, in a tone of relief, as, for the first time, he removed his critical gaze from her face, "it will be well, Graham; let Miss Craven go. For her it is kinder to consent than to pretend to spare her; and for him—we shall see."

"Thank you," she said, with touching simplicity. "I will do exactly as you bid me. Hervey," she added, laying both her hands upon her cousin's, "you will tell them the doctors let me stay? Give them my love and—take care of them. Good-bye."

"I think," remarked Sir Edward, aside to his friend, "that we shall not regret this step."

With Honor's parting words, and Gabriel's message to his wife, and Miss Henderson's tearful assurance that she would not let Miss Craven

over-fatigue herself, and Sir Edward Graham's remark that Honor's presence was his strongest source of hope for his patient, Hervey left Westleigh Towers that evening.

"I cannot wait to see you after you have been—to him, Honor," he said; "if it is as Dr. Franklin and Gabriel fear, I—dare not."

So he went, as Honor followed Sir Edward Graham to Royden's chamber.

CHAPTER XII.

Friendship often ends in Love, but
Love in Friendship—never.

COLTON.

PHŒBE OWEN had had an invitation for that night, which, a little time before, it would have cost her a bitter pang to refuse; yet she hovered kindly and cheerfully now about Alice Myddelton, and entertained her pleasantly with desultory chat, which, though it might not be of a deep or original character, was yet varied withal, and sufficiently enlivening to make these waiting hours pass easily for Alice.

Yet Phœbe was, all the time, listening anxiously for the sound of wheels, or the visitors'

bell, or the sharp, double rap of a telegraph messenger. And when, at last, a cab stopped, and a familiar step ascended the stairs, it was Phoebe who sprang first to her feet, and it was Phoebe's eager voice which uttered the first greeting and question.

"Oh, Hervey, we are so glad to see you! Where is Honor? How is Mr. Keith?"

"No better," he answered, as he took her hand.

"No better," she echoed, mournfully. "Oh, Alice, think of that, after our long waiting!"

But Alice had hidden her face, and was crying bitterly; so Phoebe's energies were immediately devoted to soothing and cheering her; and Hervey (totally at a loss himself) felt little inclination to treat her excitement with his old languid contempt.

To his great relief dinner was soon announced, and Phoebe turned to him with a simple, but to him rather comical, assumption of the matronly hostess.

“Will you take Mrs. Myddelton, Hervey, and I will follow?”

Of course he offered her his other arm, but she refused it, with a remembrance of his old prejudice, and walked demurely behind them, with no anxiety about a cover not being laid for Hervey, so long as any one of Honor's servants knew that he was in the house.

To each one of the little party the presence of the servants during the next hour was a relief. The restraint, and the necessity for trivial subjects of conversation, were a preparation for what there was to tell and to hear, and a pause of rest between the old suspense and the new certainty.

Hervey did his best to make the meal a pleasant one; and Phoebe, at the head of the table, did her best to take Honor's place; while the ease of both her guests, and the active courtesy of one, proved that she had to a certain extent succeeded. Yet could they not shake

off the vague shadow of fear which brooded among them.

"May I come?" inquired Hervey, as Phoebe and Alice passed him at the door. "I have no wish to stay—if I shall not intrude."

They nodded with a smile, and he followed them to the drawing-room, for he was in reality anxious to get their questions all answered, and his messages delivered.

"Had Gabriel no hope, Captain Trent?" inquired Alice, without introduction, as she stood beside the window, her hands locked before her.

"It is a very hopeless household just at present," he answered, sadly; "but Honor said I must tell you that Sir Edward Graham has great confidence in Mr. Keith's fine and unimpaired constitution, and thinks if he can sleep it may be all right. I fear the other doctors do not agree with him; but still Honor told me to tell you that; and—and she asked me to remind you that the issue is in Kinder Hands

than any of ours, and that if—it is a life *worth* praying for,” concluded Hervey, brokenly.

“Had Honor seen him?” asked Phoebe, presently.

“Not before I left. I would not wait to see her afterwards, if I could have done so, because Miss Henderson told me that if she lov—if she felt for him, the sight of his suffering would be like death to her. I’m sure it seemed to have had almost that effect upon your husband, Mrs. Myddelton. Now may I try to give you his long message?”

“Phoebe!” cried Alice, as Phoebe moved towards the door at these words, “please do not go. My husband’s is no secret message.”

Phoebe stopped and turned, blushing as she met Hervey’s gaze, for it betrayed both his appreciation of her thoughtfulness and his pleasure at her return to the group.

The message was soon given; and then, in softened voices, as they lingered together, they

talked still of Royden. But after the subject had been broken by the entrance of the servants with coffee, they each avoided—perhaps in thoughtfulness for the others—a recurrence to it.

“Hervey,” said Phoebe, very much appreciating her novel position of the most useful and important member of the party, “were you not surprised when you heard that Lawrence Haughton had gone abroad?”

“Not so much surprised as I was when I called for my letters a few hours ago, to find that Theo and her mother go abroad to-morrow. My aunt sends me the information in time for me to call—if I choose.”

“And you will?” questioned Phoebe, with a quick and inexplicable blush.

“Not I.”

“Can you picture Jane alone at The Larches?” she asked, with a perceptible lightening of her tone. “Honor is going to ask her to Abbotsmoor, though she *has* so many times refused to come here.”

"But have you heard the latest news of all?"

"About whom?"

"Your ex-guardian's ex-clerk. My man told me this evening when I called at my rooms. It seems that the day before yesterday Slimp wrote to Mrs. Trent (with whom Lawrence had always had business intercourse), saying that as he had a private communication of great importance to make to her, by which he could save her from heavy financial loss, he should have the pleasure of waiting upon her immediately after his letter. He drove to Harley Street in a hired wagonette, and just as the driver pulled up the horse before my aunt's door, something frightened the animal, and it shied suddenly. Slimp had been leaning back in his seat at that moment, his neck against the edge of the rails, and the sudden start in that attitude broke his neck. He lived for an hour, and spent that hour in a vain and horrible effort to speak—useless, of course; and no one will ever know

either what important information he had been going to give my aunt, or what possible confession he might, in that last hour, have wished to make. I don't know, of course," concluded Hervey, "but I fancy that the statement he wished to make would have been a betrayal of somebody's confidence, for a purpose of his own ; but let us give him the benefit of the doubt, as death overtook him so horribly."

"It was horrible indeed ! I remember Lawrence told us he was in London."

"Yes, and strange to say, my man saw him going from here only a few minutes before he sent the letter to Miss Trent. I cannot understand it."

Nor of course could either of his companions. Of the only two who understood it, one was on the Atlantic, and the other watching beside a sick-bed.

Hervey Trent had decided to go back to Westleigh Towers next day ; so, before he left,

Alice Myddelton went away to write a letter to her husband.

"And you, Phœbe?" questioned Hervey.
"Shall you write to Honor?"

"No, I think not. You can tell her all I could tell, and she will not care to have to read letters now."

He was looking curiously at her, wishing he could have heard or seen her reception of the news of Lawrence Haughton's departure, which she had told him so coolly.

"Phœbe," he asked, standing before her, and laying his soft white hands upon her shoulders, "are you fretting?"

"Fretting! How do you mean, Hervey?"

"I mean—pardon me, Phœbe, because we are such old friends—I mean, are you sorry Haughton has left England?"

A real laugh ran through her lips.

"I did not care at all," she said, honestly, "I cannot even understand now how I *ever* could have cared."

"That's right."

"Why?" she asked, puzzled more by his manner than his words. "It would have been quite natural to have fretted for my old guardian."

"Quite. But still I would rather you did not."

"Why?" she asked, again.

"You would have fretted for him if you had loved him still."

"Of course I should."

"And equally of course I would rather that you did *not* fret."

"I thought it unnatural not to feel it more," she said, only vaguely comprehending Hervey's meaning, yet feeling a quiet sense of happiness steal over her, as she read a new interest in his face and tones.

"Phoebe," he said presently, "do you think that anyone who has spent a good many years of his life loving one person with all his heart, would be wrong to end by loving some one else?"

"Why should he be?" she questioned simply.

"And do you think that you could trust anyone who said he loved you, if he owned at the same time that you were not his first love, nor—nor loved quite in the same way?"

"I do not quite understand you," said Phoebe, her face suffused with blushes. "Are you throwing back upon me my old silly love for Lawrence?"

He smiled at the feeble little barricade through which the fire of her blushes frankly displayed itself. "I am telling you," he said, growing more and more earnest, "of a love for Honor which I have always nourished without a shade of encouragement. I am telling you that *now* I know this love to be most hopeless, and I am asking you if you think that, having felt this love, I have any right to offer another love elsewhere?"

It is not to be supposed that Phoebe understood his nature sufficiently to see that he had never yet felt deeply enough really to suffer,

and that this affection was as likely to be lasting as his first ambitious and persistent love. She only said, in a tone which gave him more hope than could any other reception of his confession,

"No one could help loving Honor."

"Thank you, Phœbe," he exclaimed, heartily ; "and you see how hopeless that love is for me, because Honor's going to Westleigh Towers, shows that she loves some one else."

"Yes."

"I knew before," he added, softly. "And I feel as if I had *always* known it."

"I used to fancy it, but I was never sure until she heard of his illness. And," she added, with a thoughtfulness which was new to her voice, "none of us, who knew Honor, can believe in the possibility of her loving a second time."

"I never dreamed of that, Phœbe ; never. I have put away the old love for ever."

Another pause, and then he gently took her hands, and holding them between his own, asked her one more question

"Phoebe, we know all about each other, don't we?—even about those other loves which will never be anything more to either of us—and we have been good friends, and we get on well together. I am not quite the vain and idle fellow I used to be, and with Honor's gift of the Bank partnership, I shall be able to take a comfortable house, and live in good style. Phoebe, will you think this over, and when I come back tell me if you would be my wife? I do not ask for your answer now," he added, pitiless for her blushes, as he kept her there before him, "because it would be unfair, as you have not thought it over, and I have; but let your answer be *Yes*, Phoebe."

"I—I forgot something I want to send to Honor," cried Phoebe, and ran from the room in nervous haste.

"It was best to give her time," mused Hervey, encouraging the pleasant consciousness that (won either now or then) Phoebe's answer would be a happy little *Yes*. "It was more

fair, and she will tell Honor before I need. She is a good little thing, and very amiable. I'm really glad she is not handsome—like Theo.'


CHAPTER XIII.

I would not raise
Deceitful hope ; but in His hand, even yet,
The issue hangs ; and he is merciful.

SOUTHEY.

A HEAVY, mournful silence brooded over Westleigh Towers, but this silence centred and culminated in the chamber where Royden lay. It was lofty, like all the rooms at the Towers, but not large. Though handsomely, it was but slightly furnished, and the old carved bed on which he lay was shrouded by no curtains.

Beside this bed sat Honor, in her soft white dress ; lovely, in spite of the pity and the sadness



on her face. At the window, Miss Henderson was spoiling her work with tears, though she sewed on with a nervous persistency.

Shaded from the light, the dark worn face upon the pillows moved to and fro unrestingly.

In the dressing-room beyond the half-closed door the nurse sat waiting for a summons, and downstairs the physicians were again consulting; and still again only reaching that one reiterated conclusion,

If he could but sleep!

“Honor!”

The girl's head was raised, and she listened with drawn-in breath. Again a moment of hope, and then her heart sank, as it had sunk a hundred times before, for this was no recognition, only a part of the persistent and terrible delirium through which she sat beside him, in the awful actual pain of her watching and her love, while she was unknown to him, and unheeded.

"Honor—Honor." The whisper, in its intense and passionate entreaty, pierced to every corner of the room. "You said you would not come—here—to my own house. But Mrs. Payte—promised. Come, dear—let me show you—my home. Why stay beside the statue—I remember—Leda and—and who, Honor? We talked about it—you and I—and then you said—you loved me. Ah! I thought the joy would have killed me. But joy never kills—pain kills—and fire. Put your hand upon my head—Honor—and feel—the flame."

But when she laid her soft, cool palm upon his brow, he shrank from her touch, and cried how quickly the waves rose.

"Honor—Honor."

So the name, hour after hour, broke the silence; sometimes whispered very low in his exhaustion, and sometimes uttered passionately in fevered strength.

Yet when she knelt beside him, and met his restless eyes, he only whispered, with a smile,

that she was safe with him, and he would bring Gabriel back.

Pleadingly sometimes she called him by his Christian name, stroking his hot and restless hands, or holding them gently to her lips. But still he did not know her; and gazing into her troubled face, would cry for Honor still. Sometimes he rose and pushed her from him with a sudden momentary strength; but sometimes he lay as motionless as death, his eyes so unnaturally large and bright, fixed where she could not follow them.

Scene after scene from his past life he lived again in this delirium, but only a very few of them could Honor comprehend. She knew when he was cheering and encouraging Alice; she knew when he was answering Lawrence Haughton's base suspicions, and she knew when he was telling Gabriel how surely his innocence would one day be acknowledged. But worst of all it was to hear him hastening his horse through the rising flood of waters, and to see

him hold his clasped hand for hours on his breast, guarding Gabriel's secret.

Now he was pitiful, now angry, now troubled, and now glad. Now he would lie for hours, as if wrapped closely in one all-engrossing thought, and now he would wake the echoes of the silent house with quick, clear laughter. It was a terrible time for all the watchers, but far the most terrible for Honor; and still that sleep upon which the physicians built their only hope seemed as far off as ever.

At last there came a day when Honor, watching as ever, fancied she saw a change in the thin, dark face. Royden had called her softly once or twice, and when her eyes met his, so closely and so yearningly, his closed; and she fell upon her knees and prayed that this might be sleep. Dr. Franklin entered the room just then, but, after one glance, passed back without a sound. Miss Henderson dropped her work, and sat utterly motionless, as if a breath would wake him. Gabriel stopped on the spot where

he had stood when Honor's sign arrested him; and Honor, still on her knees beside the bed, hardly dared to draw her breath. Ah! such a relief it had been to see the lids fall upon those wide and fevered eyes.

So, in hushed and breathless silence, they waited; no one near the bed save Honor, who knelt just where his gaze could fall upon her when he awoke. "*If* he awoke," as Dr. Franklin said. So, minute after minute and hour after hour went by, and Sir Edward Graham sent various telegrams to patients in London, and let the trains depart without him. For more than a week now there had been no deeper hush at night over the great house than there had been in the day; but to-night the silence was so intense that that past silence seemed as nothing. Miss Henderson shuddered in her stillness, remembering Dr. Franklin's "*If*," and knowing the silence could not be deeper—even then.

Gabriel Myddelton, leaning against the cur-

tained window, in an attitude of intense stillness and watchfulness, never moved his eyes from that sleeping face. Would the waking ever come? Would there be recognition at last in the fevered eyes, and light upon the dazed brain? Without the faintest movement, Honor knelt beside the bed, her eyes patient and beautiful even in their agony of fear, her hands clasped, and her whole heart pleading with her Father.

So the hours passed on, and the silence of the room was only broken by that fitful breathing.

“Ah!”

It was Sir Edward's voice, she knew, though it was only a half-breathed whisper. She knew in an instant what it meant, for she had herself seen something which prepared her for it—Royden was awaking. Moved by an impulse which she could not resist, Honor covered her face. After all that had gone before, the suspense of those few moments was unbearable. A sudden

pause in the fitful breathing; then one word,
uttered in an awed and wondering whisper,

“Honor!”

But that whisper told her that the light had
come, and that he knew her.

CHAPTER XIV.

Here she comes!
 In the calm harbour of whose gentle breast
 My tempest-beaten soul may safely rest.

DRYDEN.

THE crisis had past! Who can tell the magic of those words, until—without one gleam of hope—they have watched the fierce and awful contest between life and death?

It was not for many hours after Royden's recognition of Honor, that they dared to leave her alone with him. A whole night and day passed, while he lay quite still, his breath calm now, though very faint; his eyes always following Honor's form if she moved about the room,

or cleaving to her face when she was beside him. But when the quiet evening-time came round once more, they two were left alone together.

Then her long and bitter penitence found words, and very quietly, because all excitement was dangerous for him, and very humbly, she begged him to forgive her that, though she had loved him dearly for two years, she had been perverse and doubting, and had let him fancy that she did not care for him. Without mentioning Theodora's name, she told him just a little of the true cause of her avoidance of him; but the blame was all for herself in this confession. She told him that never since that autumn afternoon, when he had told her that he loved her, had she dreamed of any other love; and that—even if he had not been true to her—she must still have been all her life true to her own unconfessed love. She told him that these last terrible days had shown her that he had cared for her through all, but even the pain which

she had given him was less than the pain which she had given herself.

All this, and more, she told him, her low voice stirred and broken in its earnestness and humility; and though for so long he did not answer her one word, she understood the love and happiness which lay within his eyes, and the depth and earnestness of those few words of gratitude which he whispered while his wasted hands closed over hers.

Though slow, Royden's recovery was steady; and presently the day came for Honor to leave him. He lay at the window in his dressing-room, still very weak, though suffering little pain now; and Honor, dressed to start, had come back to linger with him to the last minute. As she came up to him, he rose and walked a few steps to meet her.

"My sunbeam!" he said, "my captured sunbeam, how can I spare you even for this little time?"

"Because it is only for a little time," she an-

swered, with a smile for him, although the sorrow of this first parting saddened her eyes.

"I have been trying," he said, as they stood together at the window, his thin hands wrapping hers, and his great love even strengthening his worn face, "to accustom myself to the vacant chair, and to the knowledge that the form and face I love are only here in memory."

"But I did not give you time to succeed, did I?" she questioned, brightly. "I could not spare a minute from this last hour."

"Honor, my sweet, when will you come—home?"

Very simply and earnestly she answered, while the bright pink spread softly from cheek to brow under his yearning gaze.

"When you come for me, Royden."

"Even yet it seems too good to be possible," he said, with a long-drawn breath, while his eyes left her face for the first time, and strayed out among the plenteous summer leaves. "For life to have been given back to me in such

fulness; and, with it, the greatest blessing life can hold! A few minutes ago I almost fancied I was going to awake and find that this had been the delirium of fever."

"*That delirium,*" she said, touching his cheek softly with her fingers, while a shadow stole into her eyes even at the mention of it, "has passed for ever, Roy, and God has given us to each other."

And at her touch his gaze came back, and his weak arms were folded about her, strong for that moment in their sense of ownership.

A call under the open window, but Honor only looked down with a nod and smile, while she tempted Royden back to his couch.

"Hervey thinks, as he has come on purpose to fetch me, that he must give me constant reminders of the time," she said, with a laugh; "but I shall trust to Gabriel. He is there with Hervey, and he says there is no need of haste."

"Gabriel knows how precious every moment is to me."

"It will be such a comfort to feel he is with you, Roy; and I will take such care of Alice. But I want to ask you one question before I go? May I?"

"So doubtful, is it not, my sweet?"

"I want," she said, her face and voice both full of earnestness,—“please to understand me, Royden—I want old Myddelton's money to go to old Myddelton's heir."

"Who is that?"

"Gabriel, of course. He is the only Myddelton; and he ought to go back to Abbotsmoor, and make the old name loved and honoured there."

"Honor, my darling, the power to distribute this wealth was put by old Mr. Myddelton himself into his sister's hands, and she chose you. Gabriel was *not* disinherited. He was to have the same chance as you all had."

"Yes; but he never had it, because of the in-

justice which had banished him. But for that, Royden, I am sure that Lady Lawrence would have been the very first to acknowledge his prior claim."

"True, dear one; but the fact stands. She left it in no whim, but with sound judgment, built on long thought and observation."

"You are only tempting me, I think, or trying me," she said, with a pleading touch upon his arm.

"Am I?" he asked, with his rare smile.

"Yes; and I believe you really think, as I do, that Gabriel Myddelton must have Abbotsmoor, and his uncle's wealth."

"His name is free now from reproach," said Royden, "and can be borne uprightly. He has sufficient to buy a little estate to hold himself and Alice, and to keep sorrow from the door. He tells me that is the extent of his ambition. So, even if you offered him this gift, you would only hear him refuse it. For years

he has believed in the old legend of there being a curse on old Myddelton's money, and one can see, even yet, the traces of his old timidity and self-distrust."

"Royden, I'm *sure* you are jesting or teasing me. Gabriel cannot really believe that old superstition; and does he not know now that *you* will help him? He cannot shrink from wealth because of its evil, when you have unconsciously shown him its good. Roy, you are the friend to whom he will always listen, so you will join me in urging this?"

"Honor, my darling, if anything could kill the old superstition in his mind, it would be the knowledge he is gaining now of what old Myddelton's money has been in your hands."

"I have never even lived at Abbotsmoor yet," said Honor, blushing vividly. "The work there has to be begun. I am so glad it is for him to begin."

"Is there anywhere you have lived where

they could not tell of help, and comfort, and relief, which old Myddelton's money, passing through these gentlehands, has given? Mysweet, look up; I will not pain you even by words so true. But, remember, the money was entrusted to you by one who was deeply anxious for it to do good. And remember how many noble and generous plans you have begun to work out."

"Gabriel is very earnest and very generous," said Honor, softly as she rose. "I know—as well as I know how unjustly persecuted he has been—that he will wisely and kindly use that wealth which ought naturally to be his. Abbotsmoor must be Gabriel's, of course; and, Roy, I think you were only tempting me in jest, because you know there can be really no doubt about it."

"There can be really a great deal of doubt about it," put in Royden, looking into her face with a pride which he tried in vain to hide,

as he maintained his argument still. "Gabriel will be the first to see this doubt, and all the world will see it afterwards."

"Don't you think," she asked, softly, "that he will rather see that duty bids him make the old name loved and honoured in the old home? Royden, I know you will help me to persuade him."

"I am afraid I shall," he said, looking down upon her with untold love and pride. "And if Gabriel does accept it, I am quite sure that, in his gratitude and his new earnestness, he will continue all you have begun. Ah! his summons already. How soon it has come! And—and it will be so selfish to fetch you back to me while I am such a——"

"When you come," she interrupted, laying her fingers on his lips, "I shall be ready, Roy. Good-bye."

"And *this* parting is not sad," he said, his thoughts resting for a moment on another

“Good-bye” which she had uttered long ago.

“Your love is mine now—mine for ever. Oh!
my sunbeam, good-bye!”

CHAPTER XV.

“Es summt, es schwirt, und singt, und ringt.”

SUCH a wedding it was!

Miss Trent tossed aside the papers when they reached her in Baden-Baden, and with much sarcastic embellishment, told an English gentleman that night at *table-d'hôte*, that Mr. Keith of Westleigh Towers had out-witted the less diplomatic candidates for Old Myddelton's Money.

“On the 30th. inst., at Statton, by the Rev. Walter Romer, Honor Craven, to Royden Keith of Westleigh Towers.”

This was the simple announcement which had

been sent to the leading papers; but it had not prevented the paragraphs being longer and more glowing elsewhere. The wedding ceremony spun itself through an entire page in each of the rival Kinbury papers, and the dresses and the jewels and the guests were dissected in whole columns of various journals devoted to rank and fashion.

Honor's dress was as elaborately described as if it had lent the bride her beauty, instead of having borrowed its own from hers—as a bride's should. The "charming galaxy of bridesmaids" had a hundred lines to themselves, over every one of which the chief bridesmaid laughed heartily afterwards, even while the tears stood thickly on her pleasant Dutch face. The "crowd of fashionable guests" were named separately, and admired *en masse*. The village decorations had a minute description, and the gifts were valued at a fabulous sum. And—as is the rule prescribed on such occasions—fewest words of all were bestowed upon

the bridegroom; the Kinbury weeklies only touching upon his recent illness, and the London dailies alluding casually to the probability of his leaving his mark upon the times.

Sir Philip and Lady Somerson returned from abroad on purpose to have their favourite married from Somerson Castle; and it was in consequence of their determination that Honor could not carry out her anxious proposal for a quiet wedding.

They filled their beautiful country seat with that "crowd of fashionable guests" which the papers delighted to catalogue. They supported the "charming galaxy of bridesmaids" by a noble phalanx of young manhood. They employed the whole village in bearing flowers to and fro for the decorations of the church, and park, and village street; and yet they never fancied they had done enough to make this wedding-day a festival.

And at Statton Rectory, both Mr. and Mrs. Romer laughed heartily over Honor's impossi-

ble desire for a quiet wedding. Royden had come the day before to stay with them, and, from early morning, the village had been filled by Westleigh people, who had travelled here to see the marriage of their master. In spite of the three hundred walking-sticks which had always rankled in Sir Philip's breast, he threw the Park open all afternoon to these men who cheered so heartily when Honor passed among them in her youth and beauty, and these women who so warmly prayed, "God bless him," when Royden led her through the crowd.

Earnestly Gabriel Myddelton echoed the prayer, as he and Alice walked from the church slowly, step by step, in the long line of guests, while the joyous notes of the organ came surging through the porch and followed them.

"Ay, God bless them both!" murmured the Rector, as the bells clashed out across the autumn landscape, and there came into his mind a few words of one of those poets whose verses were

but feebly linked about the memory of his college days :

‘ Nought but love can answer love,
And render bliss secure.’ ”

No, it certainly had *not* been a quiet wedding, and Pierce was not the only one who smiled at the notion, when the excitement was at its ebb, and the travelling carriage rolled down the avenue of Somerson Park, followed by countless and curious missiles. Pierce sat beside the young Italian courier, looking down upon the four grey horses and the scarlet-clad postilions, but still he had an ever-ready word or glance for the two women who sat together in the roomy seat behind him; one of these being Marie Verrien, proud to feel that she was as much Honor's maid as was the pleasant girl who lavished constant care and kindness upon her, and never allowed her to realise the fact that her employment was merely an agreeable sinecure. This sojourn abroad—which was to restore to Royden his old strength—was also to

give the finishing touch to the benefit which Marie had derived from that life of ease and happiness which she had spent in Honor's home.

CHAPTER XVI.

Oh ! the little birds sang East, and the little birds sang
 West,
 And I smiled to think God's greatness flowed
 Around our incompleteness ;
 Round our restlessness His rest.

E. B. BROWNING.


THEY are the Westleigh bells which are now
 having it all their own way with the summer
 echoes, and telling their tale to the wind
 and waves, which, in their turn, laugh over it
 among the rocks and leaves.

Two months have passed since, from the
 tower of Statton Church, rang out the tidings
 of their marriage, and Royden and Honor are
 on their way home to receive this greeting. It

breaks upon them brightly and musically as they drive into sight of the high towers above the sea, but Honor turns and hides her face upon her husband's shoulder then, because she sees that treacherous bay where he was found four months ago, and carried home as dead.

The watchers see the carriage now, and a signal gun is fired out across the sea. Then, even more merrily still, the bells peal out ; and presently a band, which Royden himself organised long ago, among the " mill-hands," marches to meet them. Now rises the cheering of hundreds of voices, and in a few minutes the horses are gone ; and, to the music of the cornets and the voices and the bells—all harmonised by loyalty and summer gladness—their own people wheel the carriage to the door.


The upturned faces greet them in a mass, when they turn and pause in the arched doorway. Royden thanks them for their cordial greeting ; and while they answer each sentence with a deafening cheer, they notice how the



very mention of his wife brings a wondrous light into his eyes, beyond that permanent light of happiness which dwells there now.


And other friends have gathered within The Towers to welcome Royden and Honor ; friends whom we shall look upon to-day for the last time.

There are Sir Philip and Lady Somerson, cordial as of old. There is Mrs. Romer, bent, as of old, on making a favourite of Honor ; and Mr. Romer recalling with a smile of self-congratulation how, from the first, he had acknowledged Royden Keith worthy of a hearty and profound respect. There is Sir Edward Graham, beaming as if he had never looked on anguish such as that which he had witnessed in this spot just three months ago. There is Dr. Franklin, uncharacteristically hopeful. There is the old Vicar of Westleigh, confidentially asserting that there has never been such a scene as this in the village since he came to live here fifty years ago. There is his young Curate, in whose wake



comes a grave little lad who, for months now, has not only eagerly devoured the lessons that he gives (the payment for which doubles the young curate's salary), but has been with him ever in his walks and in his work. The boy's face flushes and brightens into perfect beauty when Royden, laying a gentle hand upon his shoulder, tells Honor "This is Margaret Territ's child," and Honor stoops and kisses him.

There are Phoebe and Miss Henderson, come together from the Kensington Mansion, where Phoebe is preparing for her wedding, in a state of happiness unusually calm and quiet; while Hervey makes ready that London house where she will enjoy her drives and dresses—as well as better things—and be thoroughly happy in her kindly, simple, and prosaic way. There is Hervey, reading a new translation of his old code of etiquette; the tones which used to be so slow and faultless stirred and broken now, as he thanks Honor for that gift of Deer-



grove which she bought for him and Phoebe when Mrs. Trent saw it best to leave the old neighbourhood—not that Hervey values the little estate for its memories so much as for its proximity to Honor's home; and because it is such a relief to him to feel that he need not live only in London all the year round; even though his new employment is easy and pleasant to him. There is Gabriel Myddelton, inexpressibly happy as a well-employed country Squire; proud to hear the congratulations which are given him on the manner he is carrying out—in earnest zeal—the work Honor began at Abbotsmoor; and using wisely and kindly the half of old Myddelton's money which was all his cousin could succeed in winning him to accept. There is Alice, well and strong again, because no secret presses on her now, and her husband's name is loved and respected.

So those belonging to the old life are all here, save four. Mrs. Trent and Theodora are moving restlessly from place to place upon the conti-

ment; unforgiving (as those often are, to whom the wrong is due); and Lawrence Haughton's sister is on her way to join him in Melbourne. At his first invitation—honestly though curtly given—Jane left the house in which she had grown to middle-age; sold the household gods which for years she had guarded so jealously, and sailed to a new, strange world for the sake of this brother to whom—through good and evil—she had all her life clung faithfully. Hard and cold she had been ever, but still there ran through the flint this one pure vein of gold.

The silence of the autumn night has settled down upon The Towers. Alone at last, Honor lingers at the window in her dressing-room; the curtains drawn back, and the October moonlight falling softly upon her, as she stands there, still and lovely, in her long white dress.

“Sweet, do you feel that this is really home?”

Royden has come up to her so quietly that

his words seem only a part of that long, happy thought.

“ Our home, Roy ; where your love will make me happy beyond words ; and where I will try——”

“ And fail,” he interrupts, kissing her tenderly, as she nestles within his arms, “ you *have* made me happy for all time. You need never try again.”

She does not turn her eyes from the moonlit sea, but they are filled with a deep and full content. How can even she herself help feeling the difference her love has made in his life, always so full of generous deeds and noble purposes, but now so full of happiness besides ?

“ What a welcome they have given us,” she whispers, presently. “ It filled my heart with deepest gratitude to see how you have made your people love you ; and I know how it is, Roy. In your daily life, and hourly intercourse with others—I mean in *little* things as well as great, by trifles which so many of us

do not think of—you have won a love which only such a life as yours can win, my husband, and which never can be otherwise than warm and true."

"Honor," he says, lifting her face that he may read his happiness within her eyes, "do you know that Gabriel—and not Gabriel alone—has been speaking to me in just such words of you. My darling, are you satisfied with all you hear of Abbotsmoor, and the working of your plans and projects?"

"Far more than satisfied."

"And you will let me help you here, in your own share of the work?"

"Royden, as if I could ever think of anything good which *you* have not thought of long before!"

"Do you remember that first day we spent at Abbotsmoor, Honor, when it was deserted, and the shadow of a great crime lay upon it? Do you remember how we talked of that old superstition of a curse hanging over the miser's

wealth, while neither you nor I could guess in whose hands would lie the task of scattering it?"

"Or, whose would lift that shadow of crime from the old name."

"The task is not finished, is it? It will only finish with our lives. But can we not feel to-night, mine own dear wife, that at last there rests a blessing only upon Old Myddelton's Money; and that day by day, through all our grateful lives, the blessing may grow and brighten?"

She laughs a happy little laugh, and lifts her arms and clasps them softly round his neck.

"Oh, Royden, who, in all the world, has greater cause to try to make others happy, than I, who am so happy and so blest!"

THE END.

